

Great African Mysteries



LAWRENCE G. GREEN

Great African mysteries
By
Lawrence G. Green
Howard Timmins cape town

Introduction

By Henry HOPE

THE author of *Great African Mysteries* occasionally takes a great daily load off my shoulders – the writing of a gossip feature in a Cape Town evening newspaper. Here in South Africa our pleasant paragraphs cover an enormous area, and deal more often with real lions than with literary ones. The people, too, are not always so polished as those who appear in London gossip columns. Some of them are leading lives of adventure, and they enter the *Cape Argus* office with the dust of the desert or the salt of the ocean still thick upon them. Men with snakes, men with leopard cubs, men with stories to tell....

Green and I find it necessary to go out at intervals by air, land or sea to refresh ourselves and find new material in a continent which still offers a rich field of enterprise and mystery. But if Green goes to the Belgian Congo and the backwaters of the African tropics, then I must sail for the Antarctic. Two writers cannot cover the same trail. Sometimes, however, our tracks have crossed, and we have shared the memory of strange places and odd folk, such as those of which *Great African Mysteries* is made. I am glad to have this chance of declaring that the drums, the islands, the weird animals and still more remarkable people Green describes really do exist in this Dark Continent of ours.

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GREAT AFRICAN MYSTERIES

CHAPTER 1

THE DRUMS OF AFRICA

“Boom - tap - bo - o - oom!”

THAT is the old call of Africa which drums on unchanged through the centuries. Insistent, monotonous, sometimes nerve-rending. But when all the other sounds of steaming jungles have faded from memory, that devil's tattoo lingers. The drums of Africa cannot be forgotten. They give a mysterious rhythm to the drama that is played out endlessly on the great sounding-board of the Dark Continent.

I have heard the drums in the west from Sierra Leone to Port Gentil; all along the Congo, as I lay sleepless under the mosquito-net, the deep notes rose and fell and quivered in the forest. Again in East Africa I listened, and remembered the Swahili saying: “When you play the drums

in Zanzibar, all Africa, as far as the Lakes, dances.”

There is never a birth or death in Africa of any importance, a feast, a hunt or a war without the drum beats that spread the news from village to village. White men call it the “bush telegraph” – a good name for a system which carries every sort of information across incredible distances.

My first personal experience of the drums came in almost theatrical fashion during a sweltering journey by river steamer in the Upper Congo – the country that Conrad rightly called “Heart of Darkness.” We had stopped at a trading station in the late afternoon. The smoke from a dozen fires drifted grey and acrid over our decks as the native passengers cooked their dried fish on shore. “Here we rest for the night,” announced the Belgian captain comfortably as we sat under the double-awnings drinking iced beer.



A trading station on the Lualaba River, Belgian Congo.

Then there arose a faint “tap-boom-tap,” carried down the golden surface of the river by the hot breath of the evening breeze. “Signal drums,” said the captain lazily. A minute later he started out of his languor, for a black deck-hand stood before him speaking rapid French.

“The drums were talking to us,” the captain told me. “We are wanted down the river – there is a white man with his wife and child, all ill and hurrying to the hospital at Albertville. Pray that we do not run aground on a sandbank in the dark, for we must steam twenty miles to pick them up.”

A shriek of the siren and we were zig-zagging down the river with the paddle-wheel thrashing up the mud. Several hours after dinner we slid in towards the bank, where a mission station loomed out of the darkness. A bearded Roman Catholic father in white robes came on board.” It is

good that you are here,” he exclaimed. “The mine manager and his family are coming by forced marches – very soon they will be here.”

Out of the darkness of the palm forest they came – a thin human column emerging into the gleam of our deck lamps. First a tall, shivering man in tattered khaki, his white face flushed. Then the proud and tireless gun-bearer. Next a “machila” – a sort of stretcher with the canvas awning thrown back, so that I could see an exhausted woman and a delicate little girl. (Why, I wondered, do men bring families to this cruel territory?). Finally there marched the long line of carriers with their head burdens – tin boxes, camp equipment, packages of food, the child’s playthings in a basket. As they reached the steamer’s side some of them slid to the ground, utterly weary.

It was a race for life indeed that the drums had described – a race decided by the stamina of those faithful bearers, the merciless sun and the barricade of tropical bush.

All the way down to the mouth of the Congo there were drums to remind me of that tragic family. All along that waterway, for two thousand miles, the drums spoke, rejoiced, warned, lamented. Men who knew something of the drums and their talk travelled with me and uncovered the fringe of this great African mystery.

For a great mystery it remains. There is nothing remarkable in a code of simple drum signals to announce simple events over short distances. At ordinary times that is all the drums accomplish. The traveller in the lonely stretches of Africa finds that his arrival at the most remote village is never unexpected. The drums have stated that a white man is coming. To invite one's

friends by drum call to an elephant hunt or a funeral is an everyday matter, easily understood.

The real enigma of the drums lies in the enormous areas of Africa over which the news of great events has undoubtedly been spread. Nowadays, of course, with short-wave wireless receivers in the loneliest places, there is an alternative explanation which most people would prefer. But the "bush telegraph" was at work a thousand years ago. The most noteworthy example in recent times occurred when the news of the death of Queen Victoria was cabled to West Africa. Natives in outposts hundreds of miles from railways and telegraph lines immediately began talking of the death of the "Great White Queen." Government officials received confirmation of these drum messages days and weeks afterwards.

Again, when Khartoum fell and General Gordon and his staff died fighting, the

details were known in Sierra Leone the same day. During every African campaign news has flashed across Africa in this way. Before the Ashanti campaign the British military authorities were aware of the fact that the entire native fighting forces in the territory could be mobilised within a few hours of the declaration of war.

From east to west, from south to north, the drum news travels. The rising of Lobengula and the Matabele impi's in 1893 was known almost immediately from Mombasa to Accra. Another astounding experience of the "bush telegraph" is told by Mr. Owen Letcher, the South African mining expert and traveller. He was passing through an isolated village in North-Eastern Rhodesia one night in 1911, when he heard loud sounds of wailing and sorrow among the native women of the Wanda tribe. This was during the Somaliland campaign; and six weeks later came official confirmation of the drum

message which had caused so much misery. Mr. Letcher then learnt that a company of native troops, recruited from the Wanda tribe, had been completely wiped out in an engagement. The day of the defeat, and the mourning hundreds of miles away, coincided.

A study of these and many other authentic records of the power of the "bush telegraph" draws one irresistibly to the conclusion that there is a well-organised system of drum signalling up and down Africa – a system capable of transmitting any information with considerable speed. How is it done? It seems incredible that savages should have been able to perfect such a means of communication.

The first tremendous obstacle which must have been overcome was that of language. From the day the first white explorers penetrated the Dark Continent the confusion of dialects has been a stumbling-block.

There are in Africa about six hundred languages, though many have resemblances which justify their division into groups. In certain parts of Africa, too, you will find a lingua franca which nearly all understand. A drum message thumped out by the Ashanti in the Hausa language would be interpreted almost everywhere north of the Equator and west of the Nile. But it would convey nothing to the Swahili, whose speech is heard all the way down the east coast of Africa and far inland. In Nigeria, in the French Congo and many other colonies there are primitive tribes which are cut off, not only from the world, but from the people of neighbouring territories. Yet no corner of Africa is so remote that drums are not used and understood.

Men who had lived long and close to the far edge of things in Africa helped me towards a possible solution of the mystery of the long-distance drums. They spoke of the secret languages which are constructed by

the initiates of many tribes. Extreme ingenuity is displayed by certain of the quick-witted groups of natives in using these ever-changing code tongues. It is said that a chief in the Cameroons invented a secret language embodying English, French and German words – only the meanings given to them were entirely different from those of the white men!

The traders, missionaries, river-steamer captains and other exiles of the African tropics who discussed the subject with me agreed, almost to a man, that there is a lingua franca of the drums which is known to the cleverest drummers of practically all the races in the continent. The great bulk of drum traffic would be beaten out in the dialect of the district, and would not carry beyond its boundaries. But when great events happened, when the English and the Frankis (French) were seen to be attacking the Germans, then the drums were set throbbing across the continent in the

special language which is the Esperanto of Africa.

The drums do speak. Their talk is far more like the telephone than the dot-dash of the Morse code. I have examined many talking drums in East Africa, the Congo and the West Coast, but the finest of all I have seen were at the French Colonial Exhibition of 1931 in Paris. A Congolese native played them. As the wild notes thudded out through the forest of Vincennes my mind went back to Africa, though I felt none of the awe which I have known on a dark night at Stanleyville when the same sound quivered in the air.

The most impressive drum is that hollowed out of a huge tree-trunk. Some of this type are more than twelve feet long by five feet thick. As the slit in the log is only an inch or two in width, the hollowing-out process calls for great skill and perseverance. Faulty workmanship would ruin the note of

the drum. The exterior is often elaborately carved, so that the drum strongly resembles a hideous idol with face complete and feet and arms indicated.

One lip of the drum is thicker than another, so that the natives will tell you there is a male voice and a female voice. The Ashantis use two drums to produce these different sounds – drums headed with leather, standing on legs and beaten with the hands or small sticks. There are dozens of other types of drums – some of them played only for dancing, war, or in honour of a potentate – but here I am dealing purely with the talking drums.

The chief usually owns the talking drums, and they are kept in a special place, under a thatched roof, where no man save the drummer dares to touch them. Their range, under ideal conditions, is probably never more than twenty miles. Much depends on the skill of the drummer – a man who, in a

prosperous village, does no other work. He is trained in an art more difficult than the mastery of any musical instrument in civilised lands. He must learn the special names for people and things in the drums' language – names which are taboo on all other occasions. High and low notes, a meaningless rhythm to European ears, become words that make sense when the tribal drummer is listening. For this much is known – the drums send whole words, phrases and sentences, not mere letters like the Morse code. Most of the African languages lend themselves to this effect; a change in tone gives a different meaning. Just as a tune becomes familiar to us, and may be followed even when half-heard, so the drummer can translate a faint message by the context.

Before the white man came the drummer who made a mistake was cruelly punished. Possibly, in the unmapped forests of the French Congo and other undeveloped

colonies, a drummer still has his hands chopped off for playing a false note. A faultless drummer, however, holds an exalted position among his people – he is not easily replaced.

Such is the magic by which the Matabele in the south may speak to the Somali, the Barotse, the Herero, the Yoruba of Dahomey and the Sudanese. The theory which has been advanced that messages are conveyed by telepathy may be discarded in view of the concrete evidence of the drums.

Those drums – I hear them now, beating like the black heart of Africa. Shuddering down the wind come their voices, a barbaric cadence, sometimes like a deep organ note, then running abruptly into a higher pitch. Of course they are talking, though we can distinguish nothing more than the man voice and the woman voice.

“Boom-tap-boom! Dumm ... dum ... t-rat ...
t-r-r-rat ! Bo-o-o-om!”

Those are the sounds which are flung over
an invisible spider-web reaching into the
farthest corners of Africa. Relay after relay
passes the word on. Is it war or peace?

Has a great chief died? Is a great silver
bird sent by the white man roaring over the
Nile or the Niger?

We hear, but all our white civilisation
cannot help us to interpret that message.
The drums of Africa remain a mystery. We
can only listen.

“ Bo-o-o-om !T-rat !Boom!”

CHAPTER 2

MYSTERIES OF AFRICAN EXPLORERS

WHO was the first navigator to sight the great mass of Table Mountain against the sky? For more than four centuries the Portuguese explorer, Bartholomew Diaz, has received the credit for the discovery. There is no doubt about his famous landfall – but was he the first sailor from a foreign land to round the Cape of Storms? In recent years there has grown up a strong body of opinion, supported by valuable evidence, which gives the honour to unknown sailor men of other nations. Two thousand years before Diaz set out from Lisbon with his caravels there were bold Phoenicians in these seas. The Chinese undoubtedly reached the coast of Africa in their junks. And there is a strong probability that far-wandering Malays voyaged in great canoes as far as the east coast of Africa, even though they did not venture as far south as the Cape of Good Hope.

The possibility of a Chinese junk having rounded the Cape some hundreds of years before Diaz is not mentioned, as far as I am aware, in any South African history book. This is surprising, even in the light of historical fact. Early Portuguese records of voyages in the Indian Ocean speak of Chinese junks trading to India, East Africa and the islands – not of lone junks exploring the seas but of well-equipped fleets. The *Book of the Marvels of India* describes a Chinese fleet of a thousand ships, well-armed and carrying regiments of soldiers, to defeat the Arabs and bring back cargoes of slaves and ivory. The destination of this expedition was the island of Kambalu, which may have been Zanzibar or the Comoro Islands to the west of Madagascar. Many references to this Chinese raid occur in Arabian and Chinese literature – it is fact, not legend. The date is given as A.D. 945.



A street scene in Zanzibar

The Chinese left their mark in Africa and the islands. Half-castes with high cheekbones and Chinese pottery of the Sung dynasty – these are signs which cannot be mistaken. In the Comoro Islands the natives still speak the Makua dialect of Bantu, and Makua means “the eastern people.” The late Professor E. H. L. Schwarz, who searched a much wider field than the Portuguese and Dutch archives, once declared that the Bechuanas came of Chinese stock; he pointed to the pagoda hat, still worn by the tribe, as a relic of their ancestors.

But now we must bring these roving Chinese pirates and plunderers round the southern tip of Africa, which is still a long passage from the seas they are known to have sailed so long ago. Fortunately there is convincing evidence that junks were capable of weathering the Cape of Storms, and that some of them actually survived the ordeal.



An African musician with his “Pocket Piano”

The bat-winged Chinese junk, of course, has not changed materially through the centuries. They were seaworthy craft, fitted with primitive compasses, and fully decked, at a time when the ancient Britons were paddling their coracles. With eyes in the bows and dragons across their high sterns, they took little heed of the devils of the strange waters they invaded. The junk looks ungainly. It does not capture the eye of a seaman like a Grand Banks schooner or Bristol Channel pilot-cutter. But for practical purposes the seagoing Chinese junk has been a success for a thousand years and more. Definite proof is supplied by the voyage of the junk *Keying* in 1848 – the first junk to visit England. Canton was her port of departure. She rounded the Cape in terrific weather, crossed to New York and reached Gravesend after a voyage of seventeen months.

And so it is no flight of fancy to picture a Chinese junk of several hundreds of tons

burden steering a southerly course along the coast of Africa in ancient times. She would have no tinned provisions; but herbs and ginger would be growing in barrels on her decks, close to the fragrant joss house. And in any case the Chinese preference for well matured delicacies is proverbial. How many men she carried cannot be guessed. The Chinese records state that a ship's company in a large junk often numbered a thousand men – half sailors and half soldiers.

One thing is certain – there were brass carronades on board, and opium, and crackers to scare away any *Flying Dutchman* of Chinese mythology.

This, however, was very long before the day when Vanderdecken first began his hopeless beat off the Cape of Storms as penance for his blasphemy. The Chinese had not even that legend to guide them. In all probability they fared south of Cape

Corrientes – the edge of their known world – unwillingly. Strong currents run in the Mozambique Channel; and a junk driven before the north-east monsoon might find herself unable to beat back to the familiar harbours of the east coast.

The British Admiralty sailing directions for the south and east coasts of Africa show clearly what would happen to such a junk – partially disabled, perhaps – in those circumstances. She would be swept southwards from Cape Corrientes until the warm Agulhas current gripped her. Then she would drift on in a body of water moving, as the pilot book says, with “considerable velocity,” until, she came to the Agulhas bank.

A portion of the Agulhas current passes round and over the southern part of the Agulhas bank, setting north-westward again past the Cape of Good Hope. Then it is joined by the icy Antarctic current which



One of tha famous carved doors of Zanzibar.

makes a desert of so much coast along the south-west shore of Africa.

With that north-flowing current the junk would go. We may reasonably imagine the Chinese – some of their fatalism having deserted them – beating their gongs and rattling off many a prayer as the low, unknown coast slid by. Somewhere in Namaqualand, near where the town of Port Nolloth now stands, near the rich diamond terraces at the mouth of the Orange River, the remorseless inshore current would cast the junk on the rocks – or more mercifully perhaps, on a sandy beach. Some, no doubt, came to a safe anchorage.

So far this is all mere theory. Now we approach a remarkable fact – the presence in Namaqualand of a race which shows, to this day, characteristics which are plainly Chinese. When the first Dutch settlers at the Cape made contact with these people during their expeditions in search of Vigiti

Magna and the land of gold, they called them the “Chinese Hottentots” For these descendants of castaways were plainly different from the Hottentots of other parts of the coast. They had the typical slit eyes of the Oriental. They were, in the picturesque language of the Dutch explorers, “the colour of guinea gold.”

Even their language was different. A primitive race, such as the Bushman, invariably possesses a small vocabulary and a low form of speech. Clicks, snores and warbles – almost animal sounds-make up the Bushman tongue. These “Chinese Hottentots,” however, used inflexions in tone such as are found only in a more cultured language than wretched Hottentots could have evolved – in Chinese, in fact. Other similarities between the present-day language of the Namaquas and Chinese have been noted.

Namaqualand is still a remote corner of the Union. The coast, apart from a few fishing

harbours, is seldom visited. Who knows what fascinating relics of old Chinese occupation may one day be revealed by the shifting dunes? The white people of that sun-parched corner of South Africa are more interested in diamonds and sheep, and the coming of the long-awaited rain, than in archaeology; for life is not easy in Namaqualand. Nothing has been done towards uncovering the riches that have no market value. But if discoveries are made, they will be sensational indeed. It is estimated that the Chinese visits to Africa ceased about the year A.D. 1270, when the Gujerat pirates became so powerful that trade was a hazardous affair. In all probability the full story is told in forgotten log-books stowed away in the Chinese archives – in untranslated classics and ballads.

Several history books recall the famous story from Herodotus in which a voyage round Africa by Phoenician sailors about six hundred years before Christ is recorded. But they give the narrative briefly and with reluctance, so that school-children remember only Diaz and Vasco da Gama. Now there is archaeological evidence which suggests that the story is true.

The Phoenicians, founders of Carthage, were the great sea adventurers and merchants of the Old World. That they voyaged far beyond the Pillars of Hercules (Strait of Gibraltar) in the west and certainly eastwards as far as India is beyond doubt. In quest of gold and spices, they reached Sierra Leone. Proof that they circumnavigated Africa is, unfortunately, not so ample, and until recently it was not accepted by historians. The story, as told by Herodotus, is that Pharaoh Necho ordered some Phoenician sailors to leave

Egypt by way of the Red Sea and find a way back to Egypt through the Pillars of Hercules. So they sailed away obediently into the southern ocean. "When autumn came," the story runs, "they went ashore wherever they might happen to be, and having sown a tract of land with corn waited until the grain was fit to be cut. Having reaped it, they again set sail; and thus it came to pass that two whole years went by, and it was not until the third year that they doubled the Pillars of Hercules, and made good their voyage home."

Herodotus adds a significant comment. "On their return they declared – I for my part do not believe them, but perhaps others may – that in sailing round Libya they had the sun upon their right hand."

The first objection to the acceptance of this story, no doubt, will be that the vessels of the Phoenicians were incapable of making a hard ocean voyage through all the

vicissitudes of weather which would be experienced in sailing round Africa. The drawings which have come down to us reveal the Phoenician ships to have been nothing more than large open rowing-boats, for all their elephant heads and graceful decoration. Yet the exploits of these ancient mariners have been successfully followed in our own times. Two Norwegians rowed a small clinker built “pram” across the Atlantic in 1897. Captain Voss sailed round the world in a long Red Indian canoe, hollowed out of a single tree-trunk. In recent years, too, there have been wonderful ocean passages made by Polynesians – passages of thousands of miles, lasting several months. The sea has not been the great barrier that some people imagine. We do not give the ancients credit enough for the seafaring skill which they undoubtedly possessed.

Without some more concrete proof than the story from Herodotus, however, we

might well doubt whether the Phoenicians ever beheld the Cape of Good Hope. We may even reject Professor Raymond Dart’s evidence of the bones of an old ship found in sandstone beneath the Cape Flats. But it is difficult indeed to disbelieve the Bushman paintings found by Brother Otto of the Marianhill Monastery, Natal.

The Bushmen belonged to the conventional school of art. In their caves they painted exactly what they saw – vigorous figures hunting and being hunted; human beings and elephants, ostriches, giraffes and small game all outlined faithfully, and sometimes with genius. They may be compared in one way with the art of the forecastle – the sailor who painted his ship with every block and halyard in the right position, and who would be sternly criticised if he went wrong anywhere. Naturalists have learnt much from the Bushman paintings. It has always been recognised that any object found in a cave

drawing must actually have lived in that neighbourhood.

So that when Brother Otto, after years of careful investigation and research, encountered clothed figures in some hitherto unexplored caves in the Kei River Valley (near East London) he realised that he was on the verge of a great discovery. Before making any announcement, he examined twenty-eight caves and copied three hundred drawings. These he compared with the bas-reliefs of Babylonia and with books of reference showing the clothing worn by the people of Asia Minor during the period about a thousand years before Christ. They tallied in many details. The “cloaked strangers” had white faces – the Bushmen, indeed, had taken great pains to make this perfectly clear. Phirygian caps were identified in several drawings. Even the foot-wear is portrayed. Here, declared Brother Otto, was conclusive proof of

contact between Phoenicians and Bushmen.

Critics immediately pointed out that the clothed figures might represent Arab traders, who were known to have penetrated far into Africa and along the east coast before the beginning of the Christian era. Brother Otto had an effective reply ready. Arabs and Indians do appear in certain Bushman paintings; but the primitive artists always depicted the colours of their skins beyond a shadow of a doubt. In the drawings of the Phoenicians even the arms, legs and feet had been painted white. It was a skin appearance which would naturally have made a profound impression on the little brown Bushmen and they emphasised it in their pictures.

There seems to be only one other possible explanation of these clothed figures in the strange art galleries left by the Bushmen. It

is that the artists travelled north to Egypt and, on their return, painted what they had seen. This has been suggested, but it is not a really satisfactory theory. Abundant evidence of the great southward trek of the Bushmen from the Mediterranean coast of Africa to the Cape is available. It was a gradual drift. Africa is so vast that it is extremely doubtful whether any one Bushman ever lived to see both the Mediterranean and the South Atlantic or the Indian Oceans. Attempts on the Cairo-Cape speed record had not yet started. I think we must surely reject any theory involving journeys up and down Africa within comparatively few years. That the subjects of the paintings came to the artists there can be little doubt.

And if that view is correct, the Phoenicians did discover the Cape. Herodotus, the sceptical historian, was wrong when he rejected the plain and convincing tale of those tough Phoenician sailor men when

they declared “they had the sun upon their right hand.”

Finally, there is the Malay influence in South Africa to be explained. I refer, of course, to the Malay seafarers of ancient times and not to the Malays imported as slaves by the Dutch East India Company.

In February, 1927, a Malay canoe, or *kabang*, of the dugout type, was thrown up on the beach at Port Elizabeth. A few interested scientists made enquiries, and traced the canoe to the Nicobar Islands. It had floated across the Indian Ocean unharmed from that group – an interesting side-light on the direction of ocean currents, if nothing more. Something more tangible will be necessary to show that this empty shell was preceded, centuries ago, by other canoes manned by daring Malay navigators.

Professor Schwarz, who sought the solution of more than one great South

African mystery in the Kalahari Desert, believed that the strange race he found there, the Makalakas, were originally a Malay people. The Malays colonised Madagascar two thousand years ago. Some of them, with the wanderlust still burning fiercely, cruised on across the Mozambique Channel and settled in Africa. Makalakas means People of the Sun – a fitting name for men who came from the East. In some of their place names a Malay or Polynesian influence can be traced.

The mists of time hang heavily over these old voyages. They are strangely similar to the saga of Red Erik, who blazed the Viking trail to America centuries before Columbus and left little more than a full-throated Norse song to mark his great achievement. Vikings, Chinese, Phoenicians, Malays – there were no newspapers to record the incredible hardships they suffered in their search for new land. The

Portuguese, hard-bitten old mariners though they were, came late in the day to the Cape of Storms.

3

For centuries an impressive line of stone pillars stood untouched on the lonely capes of Southern Africa, marking the discoveries of Portuguese explorers who had sailed off the charts of their day in search of new land.

These *padraos*, or commemorative pillars, are the most ancient relics left by Europeans in South Africa. Most of them have been traced; but it is possible that one or two of the lost pillars still stand as the Portuguese navigators left them on coasts so remote that no other white man has seen them from that day to this.

It is fairly certain that one such pillar lies buried beneath the sand and rocks of the Cape of Good Hope; for Bartholomew

Diaz is known to have placed one there; and it has never been found.

The stories of the rediscovery of pillars and fragments of pillars set up by Diogo Cam and Diaz form a dramatic sequel to a daring chapter of African exploration. Even after four centuries the stone monuments – called after the Saints and engraved with the Royal Arms of Portugal and the names of the navigators – could be identified beyond doubt.

The first *padrao* to be erected in Africa south of the Equator was the Pillar of St. George which Diego Cam left at Shark's Point on the south bank of the Congo in 1482. According to a local legend, this precious relic was used as a target by a ship in the slave days. Some of the fragments were collected by the natives, were recovered by the Portuguese, and are now to be seen in the Geographical Museum at Lisbon. The main pieces were

taken on board a vessel for shipment to Europe, and were lost when the vessel sank.

During his first voyage in 1482 Diogo Cam set up the Pillar of St. Augustine just south of Mossamedes in Angola. This, too, is preserved in the Lisbon Museum; and a reproduction of the pillar stands on the cape to remind sailors today of the great navigators of the past. Three years later Cam made a second voyage of discovery, reaching the place now known as Cape Cross, to the north of Swakopmund. The *padrao* he set up there was not found until 1893, when the captain of the German cruiser *Falke* landed a party there. The Emperor of Germany ordered the removal of the pillar to the Marine Academy at Kiel, and a wooden replica was erected at Cape Cross.

Mystery and strange legends surround the Pillar of Sao Thiago which Diaz set up at Pedestal Point, near Luderitzbucht (formerly Angra Pequena) in 1487. This harbour gave shelter, in the early part of the nineteenth century, to whalers, sealers and vessels in search of guano; and many a wild, reckless crew wandered over the coast that is now a forbidden area rich in diamonds. These seafarers knew of the existence of the cross; but the first report of it came from Captain Owen, R.N., in 1833. By that time the pillar had been cast down and shattered, and the iron cross surmounting it had vanished.

Such an act of vandalism might be easy to explain when drunken crews were on shore in a lawless harbour with nothing to do. But there is a queer tale which I have heard in half a dozen different forms connected with this Pillar of Sao Thiago. It is said that the tough sailor

men of the whalers overturned the pillar to search for coins buried beneath it.

Then there was the report of Captain Parker of the brig *Kirkwood*, who dug beneath the broken pillar, through a layer of bird guano, and excavated a deal box. "Upon opening the box a man with his arms across his heart and looking us full in the face was presented to our view," wrote Captain Parker. "The features betrayed an expression of terror. His garments were light and his hands had not been used to hard work. We brought him and a portion of the cross to St. Helena."

The preservation of the body of this unknown man is explained by a peculiar property of the soil of the South West African coast, which has an embalming effect. Probably the chemical constituents of the guano (phosphates) are responsible for this effect.

Two interesting riddles are suggested by Captain Parker's report. Was the body that of an officer who sailed with Diaz, and had remained there mummified through the centuries? And why did Captain Parker explore the site of the Diaz cross? It seems plain that he was influenced by one of the many treasure legends that one still hears in Luderitzbucht; but the true details will never be known.

There were ghouls in those days, for a mummified body – possibly that which Captain Parker found – was shipped from South West Africa to Liverpool, where it was exhibited as an “African relic.”

The fragments of the Diaz cross found by Captain Owen consisted of a marble base, round on one side and square, for the inscription, on the other; a block of hard, shelly limestone such as is found in Portugal; and a shaft six feet high. Apparently there were two crosses – the

iron one which was never found, and a stone cross of the same breadth and thickness as the shaft, with an inscription almost obliterated. The latter cross was seen by one of Captain Owen's officers.

Portions of the Pillar of Sao Thiago were brought to Cape Town in a guano schooner about the middle of last century, and were set up in the shape of a cross at the entrance to the South African Museum.

Portugal made vigorous efforts to recover these relics of her famous men. Chevalier du Prat, Consul for Portugal in Cape Town in 1865, made a successful claim for the upper part of the Diaz cross, which was taken from the South African Museum to Lisbon. One of the original pieces remains in Cape Town. Another fragment was taken to New Zealand by Sir George Grey, a former Governor of the Cape.

It is not known how many pedestals Diaz carried on the great voyage of discovery

which took him round the Cape of Storms and past Algoa Bay. Records in the Lisbon archives, however, make it clear that besides the Angra Pequena pillar, Diaz erected at least four more. After leaving Angra Pequena, Diaz next visited a bay which he called Angra das Voltas, near the mouth of the Orange River. Here again the cross stood like a beacon marking a treasure chest of diamonds worth millions. How different the history of South Africa would have been if Diaz had carried the first gems back to Europe!

A third pillar, the Padrao da Cruz, was left on a small island in Algoa Bay, possibly St. Croix Island; a fourth, Padrao San Gregario to the east of Algoa Bay; and the last, already mentioned, at the Cape of Good Hope.

There is reason to believe that some small fragments of the Padrao San Gregario were found many years ago and thrown away in

ignorance of their historical value. But of the others not a sign, not a broken pillar or shattered cross, has been found. This is remarkable in view of the fact that most of the pillars were set up in lonely places – some of them places which became known within living memory. The natives would not touch these pillars – they regarded them with awe.

But there are still stretches of the South African coast uncharted and unexplored. The shifting dunes may have covered these relics of old adventure, uncovered them years later, and again swallowed them up.

It is not too much to hope that one or two more Diaz crosses may be revealed in the course of the years and brought back with inscriptions and Royal Arms of Portugal intact to remind us of brave days and bold seamen.

San Sebastian is the great fort on the coral island of Mozambique – built four

centuries ago when the Portuguese were stout explorers, conquistadores, the finest seamen in the world.

I stood one sweltering afternoon on the ramparts of San Sebastian, dreaming – as that ancient castle itself must dream – over the energy and the indomitable courage of the men who founded this first outpost in East Africa. They brought the dressed stone all the way from Lisbon in their caravels. They held the fort against attack after attack by the Arabs. The riches of Africa and the East, cargoes for Lisbon, passed these grey battlements. The courtyard has rung with the very cries of adventure; the echoes have hardly died away. I can almost hear the survivors of the lost treasure ships of the Portuguese coming through the gateway with their tales of shipwreck and hardships on the unfriendly coast. A pity that we cannot hear them clearly; for the exact positions of those treasure ships might be worth a

fortune today. Their romantic stories have come down to us without those vital details.

The first was the galleon *San Joao*, which left India for Lisbon in the 'fifties of the sixteenth century with the richest cargo shipped up to that time. There were six hundred souls on board – two hundred Portuguese and the rest slaves. Among the Portuguese were the wives of the captain and other high officials – women of the best families in Portugal, according to the records.

Somewhere on the treacherous coast of Pondoland (where the famous *Grosvenor* and other treasure ships were later wrecked) the *San Joao* drove ashore one dark night. About a hundred lives were lost during the frantic escape to the shore. Casks of rice drifted on to the beach when the ship broke up; but little else was saved.

Then the survivors, under Captain Manuel Souza, started the long march northwards up the coast to Delagoa Bay. They knew that their fellow-countrymen had established a trading station there; and that, with luck, they might find a ship at anchor while the crew bartered cloth and beads for tusks and copper.

It was a ghastly journey. The rice lasted for a month; after that the desperate cavalcade had often to fight the sullen natives for food. Wild fruit, fish and shellfish was the main diet of the tatterdemalion horde in this strange country. Hunger, thirst and sudden death caused their numbers to dwindle, so that by the time they reached the neighbourhood of Delagoa Bay there were but two hundred of them.

Captain Souza and his wife Dona Leonora still lived, but their child had died on the road. Near Delagoa Bay, Souza found a friendly chief who had dealt previously

with the Portuguese, and who provided guides. Souza, however, was worn out with responsibility and probably maddened by the tropic sun. While crossing a river one day he threatened the native guides with his spear. The natives turned on the weak and weary Portuguese, snatched away their guns, tore off their clothes and scattered them.

This final blow was too much even for the brave Dona Leonora. She died; and her grief-stricken husband ran demented into the bush, where he was eaten by wild beasts. A later Portuguese expedition found his rings.

Of all that tragic ship's company of six hundred, only eight Portuguese and seventeen slaves reached Delagoa Bay. There a Portuguese ship found them in 1553 and carried them to Mozambique to tell the story of the lost *San Joao*.

Now another white ship comes sailing over the blue horizon. She is the *San Bento*, the year 1554, and the scene of disaster is that same grim coast where the *San Joao* went down.

Among her passengers is Manuel de Mesquita Perestrello, the Portuguese author, whose writings give a vivid picture of the march to safety. A quarter of the ship's company of four hundred perished in the wreck. But these determined men saved a gun, several loads of ammunition and a number of muskets. A heavy load to carry; but no doubt the slaves were given that task. When natives swept down on them, they frightened them away with musket shots. Sometimes the cloud of assegais found their marks; then famine decimated the survivors. Perestrello says: "Some were forced to eat their own boots. If someone found a bone of a wild beast quite dry, as white as snow, they ate it.

Often they quarrelled, friend with friend, for a locust, or an insect, or a caterpillar."

A little band found refuge at last on Inhaca Island in Delagoa Bay. Even then they were forced occasionally to go hunting on the mainland, and leopards carried some of them off. Perestrello himself sighted a sail after months of this wretched existence. They were taken to San Sebastian at Mozambique – twenty Portuguese and three slaves.

Then there was the *San Thome*, lost on the Terra dos Fumos – the coast of smoke – near Delagoa Bay in 1589. It seems to have been the custom in those days to send a historian with the great ships of the Portuguese fleet. On board the *San Thome* was Diogo de Conto, author of the *Decades*; and with ninety-five others he survived the wreck. Though there were only fifty leagues to cover to Delagoa Bay, many difficulties were encountered on the

way. A bitter disappointment awaited them on arrival, for a ship had left the bay ten days previously, and the Portuguese knew that two years might pass before another trading vessel arrived from Mozambique. So Captain Dom Paolo de Lima decided to send two open boats to Inhambane for help.

Both boats rode out a hurricane which arose soon after their departure, though one was wrecked soon afterwards near the Limpopo River mouth. A letter was sent by native messenger to Sofala, however, and help at last arrived. The rescuers found Captain de Lima dead. It was not stated how many others left their bones on the fever-haunted shores of Delagoa Bay.

Finally, in 1593, the *San Alberto* broke her back on the reefs of the Natal coast. Here again one finds the same terrible dwindling in numbers – three hundred and fifty-seven souls on board, two hundred and eighty-

five safely on the beach, but many of them doomed to die on the ghastly journey north.

The survivors, however, were fortunate in their commander – Captain Nuna Velho Pereira, a man whose character comes down to us as brave, wise and strong. Pereira had heard of the sufferings of previous castaways along the coast, and he decided to find a new inland route to Delagoa Bay.

So the march began, a priest marching at the head of the column carrying his crucifix. They had saved beads of crystal from rosaries which had come ashore after the wreck; and these they bartered with the natives for food. A strong religious faith comforted them: There was no plundering, no fighting – they treated the natives with kindness and were allowed to march on unharmed. The dead who were left along the trail had perished as a result of illness

or exposure. Captain Pereira had the satisfaction of bringing one hundred and eighty-two of his men safely to Delagoa Bay, where the trading ship was found at anchor.

But from that day to this, not one trace of those four lost treasure ships has been found. Other famous wrecks, such as the *Grosvenor*, have been located and relics obtained.

One remarkable discovery, however, relating to the first Portuguese voyage of discovery in these seas was made as recently as 1910. In that year an iron-bound box filled with the remains of sodden documents and portions of a devotional image was dug up near the mouth of the Kowie River.

About a century before this discovery a company of soldiers camped near the spot had excavated an image of the Virgin. It was not difficult to link these two finds;

but unfortunately the undecipherable documents were thrown away before they could be examined.

The finds are important because they marked the farthest east point reached by Bartholomew Diaz after discovering the Cape. De Barros, the Portuguese historian, relates that Diaz landed at the Penedo das Fontes – the Fountain Rocks – before turning back at the command of his mutinous crew. The log-book of Diaz shows clearly enough that he took his boats up the Kowie River to fill the fresh-water casks. He left the box of documents and the image to mark the furthest limit of his faith in this unexplored land.

Portugal does not forget that she was the first power to raise the veil of mystery which covered all Southern Africa for so long. The adventures, the exploits and escapes of these early Portuguese navigators, and that great stone castle of San

Sebastian, show what a tough race of men sailed out of the Tagus in search of new land and the sea-road to India.

4

“Strange craft,” said the trader at my table. “They come down with the north-east monsoon, and clear off again, and no one really understands their business.”

The liners off Zanzibar were dark shapes against the crimson sunset as the dhows passed, sailing wearily to the great anchorage off Malindi. The hot, clove-scented breath of the land-breeze just filled their tattered sails. One crew sang – some Arab chanty that the monsoons have blown down these Eastern seas for two thousand years.

From India, the Persian Gulf, Arabia, come the dhows each year. The earliest Portuguese explorers, seeking the sea-road to India, found ocean-going dhows as far

south as the island of Mozambique. It was from Arab dhow skippers, indeed, that Ptolemy gathered the information for his famous map of East Africa. The design of these roving craft has not changed through the centuries. In ships of this very type Alexander’s army travelled from Karachi to Mesopotamia.

Hundreds of islands and coral islets litter the Indian Ocean – some of them places where, even today, no ship flying the flag of a white nation may call from one end of the year to the other. Islands nominally British or French; but in reality so lonely that a dhow may visit them, take what she wants, and depart without a single Government official being any the wiser.



A large Persian dhow at Zanzibar

These are the mysteries of the dhows – the cargoes they carry, and the instinct which enables their skippers to find their way across thousands of miles of open ocean without chart or compass.

In Zanzibar I was eager to board the ocean-going dhows to see whether I could learn their secrets. A fleet of them lay in the green waters of the harbour. From one I could see the smoke of a wood fire rising; and in the red glow sat an old man with a green turban and thin beard. Gravely he sat, cross-legged there, his face all seams and wrinkles, smoking a *nargileh* after his evening meal. A sea-wise old navigator, indeed; the very man to answer my questions.

“How do we find our way?” he ruminated. “Sometimes it is easy. We know these coasts – our forefathers sailed here out of Muscat long ago. At sea there is the heavens, filled with stars, over our heads.

We know the different stars of the hot season and the cool season; when they appear in certain places then we must be in, a certain position. One port lies under this star, an island under that. When we are far out at sea, and the sky is covered, there is no danger – we will make the land surely enough, when the stars come out again. There is the sun, too; what use is a compass when the sun is there as our guide? We are in no hurry.”

I thought of the swift liners, fixing their positions with sextants and chronometers every watch; finding the depth by echo-sounding gear; calling for wireless bearings in fog. And I marvelled at the daring of these Arabs who cross the ocean without even an ancient backstick or astrolabe to help them.

These dhow sailors are the Vikings of the East. Their vessels, like the old Norse long ships, are undecked save for the small, high

poop. Lateen-rigged, they are driven by one or two large matting sails. The mainmast rakes well for’ard. I have often wondered how the masts stand the strain, for the running and standing rigging – of coco-nut fibre – is always old and frayed. At close quarters, in fact, the dhow has about her a decided air of antiquity. Few can afford paint. A mixture of porpoise fat and lime, or fish oil, is smeared heavily over the splintered planking. Some have carved bowsprits, and eyes such as every Chinese junk wears are often seen in the bows. Their square sterns are roughly hewn. Barnacles cling to the heavy rudder – a rudder such as Noah might have shaped for his ark.

South of Zanzibar, in the fine harbour of Port Amelia, there is a shipyard, where I saw dhows being built. This is a leisurely trade, and a skilful one. The Arab carpenters possess few tools, but they are expert in the use of the *adze*. Good timber comes from the forests of East Africa – the

hard, solid baulks which dhow builders prefer. A large dhow has two skins, with the space between filled with lime to make her watertight; so that if the skipper does make an error in navigation she will still float after scraping over a coral reef.

Not a nail is used in the construction of a dhow. Every plank and timber, deck beam and stringer is fastened with wooden pegs. This method, of course, gives a ship long life, for there are no metal spikes to corrode. Everything about a dhow is massive – bulwarks, tiller; cleats and spars. You have only to step on board one and observe the size of her ribs to see why she rides so low in the water. Yet the dhow is immensely strong. She has the right lines for a seagoing craft, the powerful bow, the beam and a stern that will not be swamped when she runs before a gale. Some of the dhows I saw at Zanzibar were more than a hundred feet in length; you could sail round the world in them. There is nothing

decrepit about a dhow when you see one with the trade wind filling the great sail and the fine bow throwing up white spray on an emerald sea.

Travelling by dhow, of course, is an experience which takes us back to the early days of ocean transport. The odours of past cargoes cling to these hard-bitten wanderers of the Indian Ocean. Cargoes of frankincense and skins, coffee and ivory, carpets and dates, cloth, rice, sponges ... All these have been heaped in the open hold, and the passengers sit on top of the lot with their baggage. There are a few water-casks; but the dhow skippers are painfully careless about this matter, and think nothing of holding up a liner to ask for fresh water. (One sometimes suspects that they do it for the sake of the tobacco and other luxuries they beg on these occasions.)

Meals in a dhow are simple, too. There is an iron box half filled with sand, for cooking. The crews seem to be able to live indefinitely on a diet of Zanzibar oranges, rice, dates and dried shark's flesh. Flying-fish come on board at night, attracted by lanterns, and sometimes a turtle asleep on the surface is captured.

No scrubbing of decks or polishing of brass work disturbs the lazy sea routine. The Arab seamen care little if the passage is long; their proverb says: "Do not count the days of a month which do not belong to thee." Each morning before dawn there comes the call to prayer. "Allaho Akobar!" In the evening, when the sun touches the blue sea rim, the skipper acts as priest again; and all on board face Mecca, dropping to the deck with their foreheads touching the wood, kneeling until the last words are chanted. "Peace and the mercy of Allah be on you!"

These fearless sailors of the dhows have a philosophy of their own. "There are no devils save imaginary devils," they declare – a creed which would make many people on shore happier. Yet the cyclones take heavy toll of the dhows year after year. Cape Guardafui, that sinister cape which even late last century was known as "the unknown horn of Africa," has claimed whole fleets of dhows. For a dhow is built to run before the wind; she cannot always claw off a lee shore.

Most dhows carry no red and green navigation lights at night, so that they are often run down by steamers. Some founder in mid-ocean.

There are still hundreds of dhows afloat today which once carried slaves, and the men of the dhows are still slavers at heart. In the Red Sea, I believe, British cruisers are often called upon to chase suspicious dhows bound for the coast of Arabia; for

there is a sort of domestic slavery in those lands which defies all efforts to stamp it out.

Now that slave-smuggling and gun-running have become hazardous ventures, the dhow owner in search of large profits turns to pearl fishing. Even among the miscellany of Eastern smells that hangs over the dhow anchorage, you can identify a pearling dhow without difficulty. The reek of long-decayed oysters cannot be shaken off.

Some of the beds of oyster shell worked by these dhows are well known; others lie in the lagoons of remote islands, and are never willingly revealed. A primitive form of "submarine eye" is used to find the precious shell – a glass bowl, or funnel with a glass bottom, pressed into the sea: Some of the Arabs are good divers, but the Somalis – deep-chested blacks of magnificent physique – are the best. They

dive naked, with noses clipped and weighted with stones. If sharks keep away, if a man is not trapped by a giant clam, and if the oyster bed is rich, then the crew of a pearling dhow may sail back rejoicing to the great pearl market of Zanzibar.

So the old dhow trade flourishes, marvellous to relate, in an age of turbines and motor ships. I see them now, with the monsoon droning in their huge square sails, the brown crew singing, the red flag of the Sultan of Zanzibar at the main. Vikings of the East indeed, sailing to fascinating harbours over the horizon.



In the native quarter at Zanzibar

CHAPTER 3

THE SOURCE OF THE DIAMONDS

WHEN diamond fever grips a man, the flame of that endless quest may not die out in a lifetime. The true prospector has infinite patience; he devotes his whole time to the job and stores up more peculiar knowledge than the trained geologist.

Outwardly, he shows few traces of the passion for discovery that burns within. It is only when he empties a tobacco bag of agates, quartz, red garnet and chalcedony on your desk that you see in his eyes a light that never shone out of the Cullinan.

For twelve years now I have been visited at intervals by a man with a face of leathery brown – a face that has been tanned and moulded by the sun and the winds of thirty hard years in the worst places of Southern Africa. Ernest Heyes, known up there on the hot coast and in the deserts as “Heyes of the Richtersveld.” The Richtersveld is a

huge half-explored area in the great loop of the Orange River near the sea. And Heyes is famous in that strange land because he can march in a day – when the devil drives – farther and faster than any other man has ever been known to do. This power of endurance has saved his life on many occasions. He likes to carry a water-bottle; but when all the water has gone he can march on through shifting sand under a blazing sun.

The quest which has kept Heyes out of the cities for the best part of his life is no mean one. He is seeking nothing less than the source of the diamonds. When other men found the rich deposits of the South West African coast, and made fortunes, Heyes missed his millions by, perhaps, one ticket in the great lottery. I do not believe that he has ever made a really lucky strike. But he marches on living page after page of an adventure story with a determination to succeed which forces admiration. I hear his



Grim symbols of the desert coast of South West Africa, where many a lost prospector has died of thirst.

quiet, eager voice now; a terse impression of his latest journey.

“Two truckloads of dynamite in the Kalahari ... temperature 110 ... ten miles to a gallon of petrol and both rear tyres flat ... cruel going in the sand.”

A long search it has been indeed. It has taken him to the old craters of Bushmanland; along the sandy coast where the desert *soo-oopwaa* wind has buried men and camels; into baked fastness's of the Kalahari where surely no man had ever been before. But it is magnificent, this ambition which drives Heyes into danger. Other men are content to find little pockets of diamonds. Heyes will not rest until he has penetrated to the very source of them all-the “pipe,” or crater, or “parent rock” where untold thousands of gems await discovery.

It is not, as you might think, an impossible quest. Let me take you back to the days

when the Germans ruled South West Africa; to the year 1908, before the Great War and the great depression; when Luderitzbucht was a roaring port of adventure, and every bar was filled with excited men who were spending recklessly thousands of gold marks.

Diamonds had just been found where no one had ever expected to find anything of value. This desert coast belt from Luderitzbucht north to Conception Bay and south to Pomona is regarded by geologists as the first solid crust ever formed on this earth. Here it was, probably, that the molten matter first cooled and solidified – assisted by that icy current from the Antarctic which still meets the hot land winds and covers the coast in a white blanket of fog.

The coast reveals many signs of the gigantic upheavals which mixed it like a pudding before the crust became hard



Man-eating shark caught by South African Fisherman in their nets

enough to resist the convulsions below. It was well baked after this stirring – you can see that by the coloured rocks and the oxides of iron. And when everything had calmed down and the coast became a waterless desert, there were diamonds left so near the surface that men scratched for them with their bare hands.

That is the mystery of this coast – the origin of the diamonds. At first they were found near Luderitzbucht, and the people then believed they were washed up by the sea. Sandy valleys open to the sea were discovered to be rich in diamonds; and those blocked by dunes revealed poor deposits. Diamonds were often found embedded in sea shells.

Men soon scattered far and wide in search of new diamond areas; but right up to the present time no one has found a diamond deposit at a greater distance from this coast than fifteen miles. (Solitary diamonds have

been found farther inland, but it was proved that they had been carried by ostriches.) This is strong evidence in support of the ocean theory of origin. The diamonds of the South West African coast, moreover; are of a type entirely different from those of Kimberley and the South African river diggings. The coast stones are smaller and more brilliant, even when uncut. Their purity is remarkable.

Certain German geologists who investigated this sudden windfall in the hitherto barren colony, however, put forward another possible explanation of the presence of diamonds. The southern boundary of the colony was formed by the Orange River, and it was suggested that the diamonds could have been swept down to the sea by that great stream and then carried north along the coast by the Antarctic current and distributed while the land was still submerged.



Seals on a rocky islet off the coast of South West Africa.

The fact that diamonds have been transported by the Orange River was proved in dramatic fashion in 1927, when the “treasure chest” of Alexander Bay at the mouth was opened at last, to the surprise of the world.¹ Diamonds are easily recognised and classified by experts, however, and as I have said the small, clear white crystals of the South West coast bore no resemblance to the famous blue whites of Kimberley. A mere journey down the river and up the coast could not alter the appearance of these hard, unchanging stones. The diamonds show no signs of travel – they are not water-worn.

Before pursuing the quest of the origin of the diamonds further, we must go back to the wild days of 1908, when the German Government – like the South African Government nearly twenty years later – put

¹ Fully described in *The Coast of Treasure*, by Lawrence G. Green (Putnam’s).

a stop to prospecting in the new area. Companies had been formed to work the deposits; the hungry legion of adventurers were elbowed out of the way by men in white collars. From the Orange River to a spot on the coast just north of Luderitz-bucht was declared *Sperrgebiet* – forbidden territory. It has been closed to independent prospectors ever since.

The diamond fever was running high, and the smell of riches lingered in the nostrils of many inexperienced, courageous men. The coast to the north, beyond the limit of the *Sperrgebiet*, was an unknown desert. Yet the lure of diamonds was there, and along that waterless coast went the prospectors with their caravans of mules, horses or camels, their drums of water, their spades and picks. The route today is staked out by their whitening bones.

Prospecting parties with sufficient money travelled to the new fields by sea. Many

landed at Spencer Bay, where a little water was found. It was not long before all this enterprise was rewarded, for the diggers found the first gravel at Saddle Hill, and at other places afterwards. When hundreds of diamonds had been picked up by the grovelling labourers, the geologists made a peculiar discovery. The stones found at the farthest north point of the diamond coast were the smallest, generally speaking. A steady increase in size was noted all the way down the coast until Pomona was reached. There the dunes were rich indeed; diamonds were largest and most abundant. At Luderitzbucht four or five diamonds went to the carat; at Pomona magnificent stones of four carats and more were picked up by the handful.

The story of this Pomona diamond field provides, I think, the most remarkable example the world has ever known of unsuspected treasure. Nearly fifty years before, the great diamond rush prospectors

had visited this desolate stretch of coast; and as a result of their reports a Cape Town firm had opened up a copper, lead and silver mine within one mile of Pomona Island. For years this company and its successors had struggled to make the mine pay. Their men must have walked on raw diamonds, shaken them out of their shoes, picked them up and flung them away unrecognised a thousand times during those unprofitable years.

When diamonds were found at last the Germans declared that the old mining companies had no right to be there at all, and the High Court at Windhuk upheld the decision. One cannot help feeling that this was almost a just penalty for such an astounding lack of observation over so long a period.

One strange sidelight on these coastal diamond discoveries was given to me recently by a master mariner who knew the

South West African coast long before the sensation of 1908. "Official records are nearly always wrong," he told me. "It is exceedingly difficult to point to one man as the pioneer or discoverer of anything in Africa – someone unknown has nearly always been there before him. Take the Luderitzbucht diamond discoveries. Sailing-ships used to put into Angra Pequena, as the harbour was called, years before there was any talk of diamonds. They loaded sand ballast; and in that sand the old shellbacks found diamonds. They did not throw them away – they sold them in Europe and America."

In writing of diamonds it is often unwise to give names – the laws of South Africa in regard to diamonds are peculiar, and necessary. So that another friend of mine who lived for years in Luderitzbucht must remain anonymous. He told me of the shipwrecked crew, castaways on the coast near Pomona, who staggered into

Luderitzbucht half dead from thirst, but with diamonds in their pockets.

He told me, too, of the grave in the Pomona area – the lonely grave of the white man who was supposed to be the real discoverer of the diamonds there. He never lived to enjoy his riches; some say that he scattered his hoard in delirium and then shot himself.

I heard also the story of a secret prospecting expedition which went out, found stones worth thousands, and buried them on an island close to the coast. The German police were vigilant at that time, and the men were afraid they would be searched if they returned to Luderitzbucht in possession of the diamonds.

That hidden "parcel" of diamonds, I believe, has never been removed. It was an enormous hoard, and the hunt for it has gone on by land and sea – and even by air – ever since. But he is a clever man who

can escape with illicit diamonds from the *Sperrgebiet* today. Police on camels patrol every mile of this rich coast. The police intelligence system is marvellous. Before a small motor cutter leaves Table Bay on a mysterious quest, word of the venture has reached police headquarters. The men on camels are there waiting when the cutter arrives – it is impossible to evade them.

I have wandered far from the origin of the diamonds; though the return to Pomona, that fabulously rich field, may bring us near the source that “Heyes of the Richtersveld” has been seeking for so long.

It is not along the Orange River, or anywhere on land that the greatest treasure of all lies. By a process of elimination, German scientists reached the conclusion that a submerged “parent-rock” exists on the ocean bed, somewhere near Pomona, and that all the diamonds were carried along a “pipe” to the coast.

A private expedition tested this theory some years ago – not in the interests of science, but for personal gain. They lost their ship on a fog-covered island while steaming at full speed from a pursuing German gunboat; but not before they had brought up one solitary diamond in their dredge.

If any further proof is needed of the sea origin of the diamonds, there is the record, printed in a blue-book, of the men who were sent by the Cape Government to prospect on Possession Island. They struck diamonds almost immediately just below the thick layer of guano left by the sea-birds. I know that certain geologists still disagree with the “parent rock” theory; but to my mind it is convincing.

“Heyes of the Richtersveld” has found veins of gold, deposits of mica and many other valuable minerals during his endless quest. But I always tell him that he will not

penetrate to the source of diamonds until he buys a diving suit.

2

One of the sights of Luderitzbucht in the champagne days after the great diamond discovery was a German hotel garden with a fountain in which two baby seals amused the drinkers.

There were more ways of making money at that time than grovelling in the burning sand for diamonds. Sealing – either by poaching or working under licence – was one of them. One British subject was granted a licence by the German authorities. He was Fred Peters, a man who had spent years on that desert coast prospecting, seeking a pirate's buried treasure and running hotels.

“A wonderful coast for poaching,” Fred Peters assured me recently, passing a gnarled thumb over the chart. “I have

knocked down seals all along here, from Hollam's Bird to Roast Beef Island – and come near death doing it. But there were good profits to be had – we did not mind the heavy weather, narrow bunks and hard tack as long as the skins came in.”

A licence cost £25, and a royalty of a shilling a skin had to be paid. There were certain protected rocks and islands, and other remote places where sealing was allowed. To make rich hauls, many of the sealing crews turned poachers and raided wherever the seals were most numerous.

Three German gunboats – *Habicht*, *Condor* and the celebrated *Panther* – guarded the coast. But there were days when a curtain of fog smothered the shore; and even in bright weather a sealing cutter could hide in little inlets and channels between the island and the beach. At that time, too, there was considerable doubt about territorial rights in those waters. The

Cape Government owned the guano islands lying close inshore, while the coast a stone's throw away was German. This queer situation offered loopholes in the law, and the poachers were quick to take advantage of it.

Sometimes small cutters and ketches would sail all the way from Cape Town to raid the sealing rocks. They had no licences – they simply cleared for “fishing” and returned with cargoes of sealskins. Often the skins were sold at Lobito Bay, where the Portuguese asked no questions.

Outside the three-mile limit, of course, seals could be taken by anyone, so that the poachers always had a ready explanation of their valuable freight. But sealing with large-mesh nets in the open water is a slow game. These poachers risked capture, and ran close in to make rich hauls. Again and again armed parties were sent out from

Luderitzbucht to arrest them; but always the raiders escaped.

“Some of the cutters used dynamite, but I would never touch the stuff,” declared Fred Peters. “There was a heavy penalty for using it, and it spoilt many skins. Once, I remember, two cases of dynamite were stolen from the Government store in Luderitzbucht. It could not be traced. Soon afterwards I saw a cutter’s crew fixing a full charge of dynamite on a buoy with the idea of drifting it down on a herd of seals. A sinker kept the buoy a couple of feet below the surface – it was as dangerous as a war-time mine. They arranged a long-time fuse and set the thing adrift. The current must have been running in the wrong direction for the dynamite came towards my cutter and went off close by. We were drenched with spray, the cutter shivered and rolled. A little nearer, and it would have blown us out of the water.”

Sudden gales were dreaded by the sealing crews. The work took them into narrow, rocky channels where a cutter might be trapped if the sea came up without warning. That was the fate of the *Sea Star*.

“I saw it all happen,” said Fred Peters. “The *Sea Star* was lying at anchor between Steeple Rock and the beach – a favourite haunt of the seals, but one of the most dangerous spots on the coast. A huge sea rushed in, the *Sea Star* broke adrift, went broadside on to the surf and turned turtle. Six men were drowned – we could not get near them. All they found afterwards was a man’s arm; the sharks are always waiting.”

The narrowest escape in the career of Fred Peters occurred in the same place. He and six others landed on Steeple Rock one morning and killed a number of seals. They were skinning the catch when heavy weather blew up. Five men scrambled back

to the boat. Peters and another man were marooned on the rock.

There is an iron ringbolt driven into the summit of Steeple Rock and used by the sealers to make their boats fast. Peters and his companion lashed themselves to the ringbolt. “Without it, we would have been washed into the sea again and again,” Peters told me. “The seas swept clear across the top of the rock; and there we clung half drowned and battered, for twelve hours. My Portuguese crew got us off then – a magnificent piece of seamanship.”

Mr. Peters made his finest haul of seals on the desolate rock known as Eighty Four. They crept on to the rock at the first crack of dawn, surrounded the sleeping seals, placed men at all the points where access to the sea was easy, and then gave the signal.

“It’s murder when you get in among them,” says Fred Peters. “We knocked down one thousand nine hundred seals that morning, and some of the skins fetched forty-eight shillings each on the London market. That meant about forty pound for every man of the crew, and sixty pound for the fellow who did the ‘beaming,’ the skilful job of separating the fat from the skins.

“Sealing is not always as easy as that. You have to wait days for a chance – the sea must be fairly calm and the wind offshore. Seals have poor eyesight, but if you approach them down-wind they will smell you a mile away. And once you frighten a herd of seals they grow cunning – you’ll be lucky to get within clubbing distance of them.”

Mother seals, eighteen months to two years old, provide the most valuable skins – a beautiful brown fur. Older seals are often

scratched and cut as a result of fights. It is in the breeding season that the bull seals are dangerous; they have been known to charge a boat when the sealers have attacked their families. A bull seal, they say, will follow a man who shows cowardice.

When the young seals have learnt to swim, the herds migrate to deep water. No one knows where they go. They are lean when they return to the rocks of the coast; but in those waters, teeming with fish, they soon recover their fat, sleek appearance. You see them seizing the fish, throwing them up in the air, biting off the tastiest parts as the fish drop, performing exactly like seals on the music hall stage.

Hollam’s Bird Islet, a lonely place rising forty feet above the sea, is the favourite breeding ground of the seals. Fred Peters has seen twenty thousand seals, “packed like fish in a tin,” sunning themselves on

Hollam's Bird. The bull seals were acting as watchmen, and when the alarm was given the whole islet leapt into life. Mother seals could be seen pushing the young ones between their flippers towards the safety of the sea. Then the slaughter started.

The sea round this little Hollam's Bird Islet has been streaked with red ever since the American sealing schooners discovered it a century ago. Here scores of poachers have carried away thousands of salted skins packed flat in their holds. During the 1911 season the raiders were so successful that the huge shipments of skins they sent to London caused fluctuations in the market prices.

At the end of the sealing season the owners of cutters looked round for other cargoes – there was nothing too adventurous for them to tackle. Some carried stores along the coast for the prospectors who were plodding along the hot beaches in search of

new diamond areas. Landing on this surf-beaten coast was always risky; and many a boat's crew perished.

Fred Peters often filled in the time by searching for the great pirate hoard which, according to the Luderitzbucht legend, lies buried on Seal Island, at the harbour entrance.

He found several caves, all blocked with sand. During his excavations, Peters unearthed several old bronze coins and a snuff-box which he thought was gold. This interesting find was lost at the outbreak of war, when he was sent to an internment camp in South West Africa.

Sometimes the cutters tried to load guano from the remote sea-caves at the base of the cliffs along the coast. These dark caverns have been bird sanctuaries for hundreds of years. They are piled high with thousands of tons of guano, worth many thousands of pounds. But the crews

of the cutters found they could not reach the caves from the sea. The guano might be worked from the shore; but the transport costs would eat up all the profits.

Fred Peters heard the fascinating rumours before the discovery of diamonds, and took part in the drama of the waterless desert that followed. As far back as 1905 a man from one of the guano islands showed him a few crystals.

Neither Peters nor the man recognised them as diamonds "I can walk inland and pick these things up by the bottle' full," the man declared. That was the rich Pomona field, where millions were made a few years afterwards.

Then some of the sealing cutters hid dredging gear on lonely rocks and fished for diamonds on the sea-floor. A number of attempts to recover diamonds in this way were made; and the German authorities grew uneasy. Finally an Imperial

Decree vested all rights for the search of diamonds on the ocean bed in the German Colonial Treasury.

During the year 1910 the Cape Government sent a prospecting expedition to the guano islands, and for eight months the men toiled among the birds. On Possession Island, three thousand loads of gravel were taken from a great trench just above high water mark, and diamonds worth £511 were found.

An interesting discovery made by Mr. D. Wilson, the prospector in charge of the work, was an old and mysterious diamond working on the west side of Possession Island. It was evident that the unknown diamond seekers had abandoned the island scores of years previously, years before any report of diamonds on that coast had reached the world. It will never be known who those old prospectors were, or what they found.

Peters had a friend in Luderitzbucht who disappeared a few days after the declaration of war in 1914. The guards had been withdrawn from the diamond fields; the Germans were thinking of defence, not diamonds. So this opportunist collected a parcel worth £80,000 and then went into hiding until the Germans evacuated Luderitzbucht and the South African troops arrived.

Such was Luderitzbucht before the Great War – a dreary town of sandstorms, fogs and withering heat where great dramas sometimes broke the monotony. There the colliers waited for the doomed Russian fleet. There on Shark Island in the bay thousands of Herero's and Hottentots, prisoners of the native wars, died miserably. A grim background for the seal poachers, the diamond raiders, the avenging German Colonial troops, the prospectors and sailors of all nations who

played their parts in these old dramas of the South West African coast.

4

Xema! A fine name for the treasure-seeking steamer with a red-haired captain and cargo of dynamite and mining gear that puzzled South Africa during her mysterious visit in 1906. The secret of the *Xema* was well kept at the time; and no details, I believe, have ever been published about the true purpose of her voyage to the coast of South West Africa.

The men who sailed in the *Xema* – a queer company of Polar explorers, sailors and mining experts – scattered when the venture came to an end. It is doubtful whether many of them knew where they were bound. But there was one man who had been entrusted with the whole plan – a quiet mining engineer who came to stay at

the old Bismarck Hotel in Swakopmund in August 1906.

“I am expecting a ship,” he told the hotel manager. Beyond that, he would not discuss his business.

One day the manager reported a black-painted steamer with three masts and a yellow funnel aft at anchor far out. The mining engineer packed his bags promptly and was waiting on the beach when a steam pinnace came in to pick him up. Half an hour afterwards the steamer moved off to the south.

She was the *Xema*, chartered by Lord Fitzwilliam of County Wicklow, Ireland – a famous treasure-seeker who, a year previously, had sailed in the *Veronique* to Cocos Island. The *Xema* had shipped at Cardiff a cargo of diamond washing machines, gas engines, sun condensers, huts, tents and equipment for a long search in a desert area. She had called at Las

Palmas and St. Helena; and word of her strange mission had travelled ahead. No one knew exactly where she was going; but rumour declared that the *Xema* was in search of diamonds.

Many other buried and sunken treasures were suggested – the bullion-ship *Grosvenor* on the coast of Pondoland and a dozen more old wrecks. But the news leaked out that the syndicate directing the *Xema's* movements had secured a licence to prospect on British Crown lands along the south-west coast of Africa. This was two years before the discovery of diamonds on the coast of German South West Africa; and if the *Xema* had been allowed to carry out a free and thorough search the whole history of that sensational find might have been altered.

It was rumoured that the *Xema's* objective was one of the rich little guano islands near Luderitzbucht, owned and worked by the

Cape Government. The Africa Squadron, visiting Walvis Bay at the time, was informed of the movements of the mystery ship. When the *Xema* passed the Squadron at sea a signal was made inquiring where she was bound.

No reply came from the *Xema*. She was a sixteen-knot ship, and black smoke rolled from her funnel as she steamed south at full speed in an effort to evade the Squadron. The Admiral then ordered *H.M.S. Terpsichore* to give chase. Somewhere in the neighbourhood of Luderitzbucht, it is said, the cruiser came abreast of the *Xema*, fired shots across her bow and sent a boarding party across to her. The ship was searched, and her master, Captain Henry Grey, was warned officially that prospecting for minerals on any of the Government guano islands was forbidden.

The movements of the *Xema* after that dramatic encounter cannot be described in detail even now. It is known, however, that a small party landed on the coast to the south of Luderitzbucht; that a small islet was visited; and that samples of gravel, thought to be diamondiferous, were taken on board.

None of these facts were reported when the *Xema* arrived in Table Bay late in September. She lay in the bay flying the Blue Ensign and the red B flag which signified there were explosives on board. Captain Grey refused to reveal the secret of the expedition. He was furious with the Cape Government. "It is a curious law which prevents a British subject from landing on British territory," was all he would say. The ship was searched for diamonds, but none were found.

Meanwhile a syndicate, hastily organised in Cape Town, had set out for the south-

west coast. These men believed they knew the spot for which the *Xema* expedition was bound; and the idea was to appear first in the field and share the spoils with the better-equipped expedition. They, too, were warned off by the Cape Government.

Many well-informed people refused to believe that the *Xema* was on the trail of a new diamond area, for Luderitzbucht was too far from the known fields to support the theory. It was said that a huge “parcel” of diamonds had been smuggled out of Kimberley and buried on one of the guano islands. All this speculation was proved to be wide of the mark, of course, when the coast gave up its age-old hoard two years later.

In some extraordinary way the men who had chartered the *Xema* had received reliable information about the great deposits which yielded millions later, and which are still rich today. It will probably

never be known how this secret leaked out; but in Luderitzbucht it is stated that a shipwrecked crew picked up a few diamonds and carried the news back to England.

So the *Xema* waited for orders, attracting a curious crowd at her berth in Table Bay Docks. The expedition, it seems, had been under the impression that their prospecting licence covered the guano islands. Captain Grey made strenuous efforts to induce the Cape Government to allow him the right to search the islands; but no satisfactory concession could be obtained. I believe an offer was made giving permission to make a preliminary survey of the islands under the supervision of a Government official. The *Xema* people turned it down – they wanted a clear field when they steamed off to their secret island. Finally the quest was abandoned, and the *Xema* left for the Far East to resume her ordinary work as a cargo-carrier.

The mystery which has remained unsolved for so many years is this – which is the *Xema's* secret island? It was Pomona Island, close to the richest field in South West Africa. Probably the island was to have been used mainly as a landing-place for the stores – there is shelter for boats at that spot, and the water between the island and the shore is so shallow that you can wade across the channel at low tide.

It is in the Pomona area, especially at the famous Ida Tal field, that the greatest concentration of diamonds is found. Here the patches of gravel bear enormous quantities of diamonds – beautiful clear white crystals and stones of every colour. The average size in the Pomona area is larger than the diamonds found anywhere else on the coast.

This was the treasure-chest which the *Xema* hoped to ransack. Never did an expedition sail with more reliable

information or a greater chance of success. They deserved better luck.

CHAPTER 4

RIDDLES OF AFRICAN SEAS

DRIFTING across the oceans of the world are thousands of sealed bottles. Most of them will never be seen again by human eye. Hundreds will be brought ashore by the tides, far from the starting-points of their voyages, and the knowledge of ocean currents thus obtained will be passed on to the chart-makers. The scientists of the seafaring nations who check these results must be patient men. These drift bottles do not cross the seas like liners – their voyages may last for years. A remarkable example of this slow progress was related to me by Dr. C. von Bonde, the South African Director of Fisheries, the other day. About thirty years ago a series of drift experiments were carried out along the South African coast. One of the bottles flung overboard from a mail steamer at that time was found recently on a beach

near Cape Agulhas, the southern tip of Africa.

The card in the bottle, requesting the finder to send it to the Director of Fisheries with the time and place of recovery, was perfectly preserved. Not a drop of water had found its way inside the bottle, in spite of thirty years of immersion. Unfortunately the old records of the experiment have been lost, and as the card bears only a serial number it is impossible to say how far the bottle had travelled.

Modern bottle papers, such as those issued by the United States Hydrographic Office, give spaces for the name of the master and the ship, the date, and the ship's position at the time the bottle is thrown overboard. Instructions to the finder are printed in seven languages. Lead pencil is used for filling in the form – some inks fade, and pencil is considered safer. "This form should be placed in a strong bottle," state

the instructions. "The cork should be driven in flush with the rim and covered, preferably with sealing wax. If the finder will return it to the Hydrographic Office, Washington, direct, or through any United States Consul he will thereby assist in the verification of the circulation of ocean currents. His services will be very much appreciated by all mariners. There are no funds available for paying rewards to the finders."

Valuable information has been gathered both by the United States and Britain through this organisation. Drift bottle experiments in South African waters will probably be revived before long; for some astonishing results were collected thirty years ago. The voyage of Bottle No. 296, in fact, almost set up a record. This bottle was set adrift twenty-six miles west of the Cape of Good Hope in June, 1900, and was found in July the following year by Mr. M. J. Oliviera, a Brazilian Customs officer, on

the coast near Pernambuco. The bottle had covered 3,000 miles at the rate of eight miles a day. This drift, however, was beaten by a bottle cast into the sea near Cape Town which was picked up on a beach in the Shetland Islands four and a half years later. Drifts of ten thousand miles have been recorded.

The simple wine or whisky drift-bottle is now being replaced, in some ships in British waters, by a new type consisting of two bottles, temporarily fastened to one another. The action of the sea water causes one bottle to be released after a certain period of time. This bottle sinks, and may be recovered in a trawler's nets. The other bottle floats on until it reaches a coast, often that of Norway. The advantage of this device is that it gives some idea of the direction of the drift apart from the starting-point and end of the voyage.

A strange (though comfortable) post was created by Queen Elizabeth, who appointed an "Uncorker of Ocean Bottles." Any other of her subjects who opened a sealed bottle found on a beach paid for his curiosity on the scaffold. This sinecure lasted until the reign of George III. A tar covered bottle, found by a fisherman near Dover, was responsible for Queen Elizabeth's action; for the bottle contained news that the Russian islands, Nova Zembla in the Arctic, had been seized by the Dutch. This queer method of spreading news recalls the legend that Columbus, fearing disaster, placed a parchment record of his discovery of America in a cask and threw it overboard. The cask, unfortunately, has never been found.

Genuine messages from doomed seamen, however, have occasionally been found. Messages of despair, they are, scrawled on canvas, on salt-stained leaves torn from logbooks, written in charcoal and even in

blood. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between these tales of tragedy and false messages set adrift after some great sea disaster. Many cruel hoaxes, I remember, were carried out along the South African coast after the loss of the *Waratah*.

One bottle message, believed to be genuine, was found on the coast of England sometime after the steamer *Brunswick* was posted as missing in March, 1898. "Sinking off Cape Horn" the message read. It is strange that the bottle should have drifted from Cape Horn to the very country to which the ill-fated steamer belonged. Such a long northerly drift, however, is not impossible.

Among the tragic messages which have reached friendly hands are these :

"Captain, all crew but me, John Williams, died yellow fever."

“Ship burned, only me, Sam Thomas, left in boat.”

“Whoever picks this up will know that barque *Caller Ou* run down by steamer.”

Covered with barnacles, a bottle thrown overboard just before the *Lusitania* sank on May 7th, 1915, was found on the shores of a German island in the North Sea in November, 1930. German experts examined the message and declared it was genuine. The note was in the old-fashioned German script, and gave the names of ten passengers. The German finders decided to send it to the Cunard Line, but the envelope was wrongly addressed and the interesting relic lost. Many years after the *Titanic* disaster a bottle came ashore describing the last scenes in the doomed liner; but it was impossible to decide whether it was real or a fake. A scarred and discoloured lifebelt, marked S.S. *Titanic*,

however, drifted into Gravesend Bay, New York, nineteen years after the ship went down.

A last, sad message found in a bottle at Miami, Florida, cleared up the mystery of the disappearance of the American tank steamer *Everett*, which disappeared in the Gulf of Mexico in October, 1923. It read: “S.S. *Everett*. This is the last of us. To dear friends who find this, good-bye for ever and ever.”

Perhaps there is a message from the lost Danish training ship, *Kobenhavn*, drifting about the Southern Ocean in a sealed bottle. That would be a dramatic find indeed.

2

What is the secret of those tremendous submarine disturbances which cause millions of dead fish to be flung on to the coasts of South Africa? I have seen a stretch of beach, mile upon mile of white sand,

covered with every variety of fish – like some gigantic fishmonger's slab.

Within a day or two the sun does its work, and then the odour of decay becomes more powerful than the reek of a dead whale.

These weird and unwelcome upheavals have occurred in Table Bay, on the very doorstep of the city of Cape Town; and along remote parts of the coast. At Walvis Bay and Swakopmund they are probably more frequent than anywhere else. The sudden visitations there, indeed, now create alarm; for in 1925 the rotting fish were blamed for an outbreak of typhus in Swakopmund.

A marine biologist, of course, would find much interest and possibly new specimens in the amazing morgue of the ocean formed on these occasions. There in heaps of hundreds of thousands lie sharks of every type, electric fish, huge skates, sting-rays and sea-snakes, the tentacles of an octopus,

fish that are caught for food and fish so poisonous that the man who eats them dies within three minutes. Even the sea animals cannot escape from the unknown death that rushes through the waters. Seals, porpoises and whales come up with the tide to add to the monstrous stench of the beaches.

An octopus of enormous size was thrown up on the beach at Noordhoek, in the Cape Peninsula, about fifty years ago. Careful measurements were taken, and sketches appeared in, the illustrated newspapers of the day. The feelers were twenty-six feet long; when stretched out they spanned sixty feet from tip to tip. There were two hundred suckers on each feeler. The repulsive body was nearly nine feet long and four feet in breadth. Nothing like it had ever been reported before along the South African coast. It was the fabled Kraken, not a myth after all, but a sinister reality.



Killer whales flung up on a South African beach

A sample of dark, muddy sand which forms the sea floor in certain areas near Walvis Bay was shown to me by my friend Wilfred Copenhagen, who spent years at sea as chemist in a fisheries research vessel on this coast. This sand contains sulphides, which are supposed to have been brought down to the sea by the invisible Kuisep River. The town of Walvis Bay has been built across the estuary of this underground river; and it is believed that a large reservoir of sulphur lying across the course of the river is tapped in times of flood. There are many signs of sulphur eruptions in the neighbourhood. Pillars of yellow smoke sometimes rise from the sea. On shore people wake at night coughing with the troublesome smell of sulphur in their nostrils, and hear a mysterious rumbling, like a distant thunderstorm under the ocean.

Sulphur holes are found in the Pelican Point peninsula, the sandy spit which

shelters the harbour. On several occasions a mud island, smelling unpleasantly of sulphureted hydrogen, has risen above the waters of the bay, only to vanish after a few days. Marvellous phosphorescent displays are seen at night. Clean breaks occur in the coast telegraph cable, as though the sea floor had shifted and snapped the wire. Very high tides are sometimes experienced, and once an iron breakwater at Swakopmund was swept away.

The weather, indeed, plays all sorts of queer tricks at the time of these eruptions. The *so-oopwha* wind of the desert drops for a while, and black rain falls. The colour is caused by magnetic iron powder drawn from deposits on the beach to the north of Swakopmund.

While line fishing at Walvis Bay is usually good, there is only one small bank, three miles wide, in an area of five thousand



Another view of the killer whales.

square miles, where trawling is possible. On this bank the sulphides are absent. Everywhere else in the area the dark sand is found – so active from a chemical point of view that anchors and chain cables come up black, as though they had just been painted.

Sulphur action, however, does not explain the astounding destruction of fish in the waters farther south. In Table Bay, for example, great numbers of fish have been cast up, stunned or dead, on several consecutive days. A coasting steamer once reported an encounter with an enormous shoal of dead fish about thirty miles north of Table Bay. In war-time it would be simple enough to explain such great mortality – a mine exploding kills every fish in the neighbourhood. But it was no invention of Man which destroyed those millions of fish at Plettenburg Bay, Hout Bay, Cape Recife and a dozen of other places on the South African coast.

Sea temperature observations taken at the time supply a clue. From the Antarctic drifts a current intensely cold, as might be expected; while the Agulhas stream is warm. It has been suggested that a sudden change in the course of a current, with a sharp rise or fall in the sea temperature on the thickly populated fishing banks, may have been responsible for the destruction of the fish. This theory, however, I find difficult to accept. Whales have been washed ashore dead on these occasions, as I have said, and it takes more than a chill to finish off a whale.

I think the secret lies deep in the ocean bed, where earthquakes occur as severe as those tremors which devastate Japan. Shipmasters report these shocks from time to time; and very disturbing they must be in mid-ocean. The first thought of a man in charge of a ship in these circumstances is that a derelict or a sandbank has been struck. The whole vessel quivers, though the sea may be calm;

and sometimes the “quake” is followed by a tidal wave.

A recent submarine convulsion gave the keepers of the lonely lighthouse at St. Lucia, Zululand, a nerve-racking experience. The tall lighthouse tower shook violently. Mechanism was thrown out of order, gas escaped from cylinders, crockery was smashed.

Such a tremor must drive living things out of the very ocean bed. In no other way can we explain the destruction of marine animals and millions of fish, day after day, so that the beaches are piled high for miles with their carcasses.

3

Icebergs on the South African coast! A striking contrast, to be sure; but icebergs have been sighted from the Cape of Good Hope in the past, and they will be seen from there again. From January to June the

ice drifts north. Enormous ice islands litter the Southern Ocean, a constant menace to shipping. Sometimes the ice does take toll of ships and seamen, so that never a soul escapes and only a mysterious fragment remains to mark the disaster.

Only a few hundred miles from Cape Town, the barque *Gladys*, in 1894, was almost completely surrounded by icebergs. Captain B. H. Hatfield, her master, found a way out of this cold ocean prison after three nerve-racking days. Just as he cleared the last great berg he saw, on the summit, the bodies of five men. There was a well-defined track along the berg, with a few possessions of the dead men scattered about. Night was falling when this ghastly discovery was made, Captain Hatfield reported, and with the wind blowing at gale force it was impossible to make any further investigation. The men, the name of their ship – these will never be known.

Still more remarkable was the story told by the master of the French sailing vessel *Emile Galline* after a voyage across the Southern Ocean in 1921. He, too, was nearly crushed in a huge field of ice; but he almost forgot his anxiety when he saw, gripped in a crevice of an immense berg, a three-masted sailing ship. Her main topmast had gone, but otherwise she appeared to be undamaged. Not a soul was to be seen on her decks, or on the iceberg. The lifeboats seemed all to be in their places.

Was this some old, abandoned whaler or exploring vessel, or was the mysterious derelict a fresh wreck? That is another of those puzzles set by the sea – a riddle without an answer. There was, however, a parallel to this mystery in northern waters many years ago. Men of the English brig, *Renovation*, Limerick to Quebec, observed two ships on an ice floe off the Newfoundland Banks. There is strong

reason to believe that they were the *Erebus* and *Terror* of Sir John Franklin's tragic expedition.

Icebergs large enough to carry a whole fleet of ships are seen in the Southern Ocean. Ice islands would be a better name for them; for they are sometimes sixty miles long, dark in colour, with masses of rock and earth clinging to them. No wonder so many non-existent islands found their way on to the charts years ago. A shipmaster in unknown Antarctic waters who sighted a great ice island would have difficulty in distinguishing between the floating mass and real land. Captain Cook called them "floating rocks," which indeed they resemble. Nothing of the same size is seen in the Arctic regions.

The explanation lies in the Antarctic continent itself – in that blizzard-swept sheet of ice which is always moving slowly northwards to the sea. Scientists

estimate that the ice-cap advances a mile in four years. Every year, in the great thaws of the southern summer, mighty coastal areas of the ice sheet break away from the land mass – with a noise like a modern war – and start their long voyages, as ice islands, across the sea.

Commander Frank Worsley, one of the most experienced Antarctic navigators of our time, once told me that the frozen graves of Captain Scott and his companions would travel with the ice-sheet until, hundreds of years hence, the preserved bodies of those gallant men would find a resting-place deep in the Southern Ocean.

A great ice island jutting out of the ocean is one of the world's most impressive spectacles. Sunshine gives marvellous colours to its gleaming walls – colours we never see elsewhere. Blue and emerald domes and ramparts; plains of purest silver; green caverns into which the sea

rushes and thunders. The light they reflect is so brilliant that the presence of a great berg over the horizon may often be detected by “ice blink” – a white glare in the sky.

Given food and warmth, men could live for long periods on these ice islands, as Shackleton's men lived on the drifting floes after the loss of the *Endurance*. The life of an ice island may be ten years. Even when it reaches warmer waters the melting process is slow; for a berg showing two hundred feet of its height above the water may have a thousand feet below. Small bergs roll like a ship in a swell. Ice islands are so massive that wind and sea do not affect their motion perceptibly. The famous clipper ship *Loch Torridon* probably sighted the tallest berg ever seen between the Cape and Australia; for the captain took a careful sextant angle and calculated the height to be 1,500 feet.

Several other bergs 1,000 feet high were visible on the same day.

There comes inevitably a day when these monarchs of the south must capsize and dwindle away – an event seldom seen by human eye. Captain Scott and the men of the *Discovery* once saw an iceberg swinging like a pendulum and finally turn turtle; but few other travellers have shared the experience. When an iceberg does break up, dangerous “growlers” are formed – small lumps which are scarcely visible, but are as large as a house below the surface. Many a missing ship must have foundered as a result of a collision with an unseen “growler.”

The ice peril in the Southern Ocean varies enormously from year to year. During one season there may not be a dozen reports of icebergs on the Cape-Australia run. The next season thousands of bergs may be recorded in the log-books of ships

following that route. Steamers, of course, steer a course further to the north than the old sailing track across the South Indian Ocean, so that modern records are not so astounding as those collected during the latter half of last century. The years 1854-55 were considered record years for icebergs until the amazing season of 1892 to 1895.

It was in January, 1855, that many vessels packed with emigrants for Australia sighted a line of bergs, connected in the form of a hook, sixty miles long. Two ships, *Cambridge* and *Salem*, were embayed in this treacherous basin of ice, but clawed off to open water. One emigrant ship, the *Guiding Star*, was trapped and lost with all hands.

About forty years later came the season which will probably remain – for the size and numbers of icebergs – as the most sensational on record. For at that time, as I

have indicated, many sailing vessels steered as far as 50° south latitude and sighted the bergs in the shapes which they assumed when they were torn away from the cliffs of Antarctica.

Thus in 1892 the ship *Kinfauns* passed a hundred bergs during one forenoon. In January, 1893, the *Wasdale* sailed one night into a huge ice area in latitude 47° south. When dawn came the captain found his ship lying in a bay shaped like a horse-shoe, twenty miles deep. The entrance was about four miles wide, however, and he had no difficulty in extricating himself from this mid-ocean harbour. In the same year the ship *British Isles* passed fully a thousand icebergs during a run of two hundred miles.

That these bergs and ice islands sometimes became a barrier to navigation is shown by the log of the ship *Ladas* in March 1895. She encountered a continuous series of

icebergs without an opening anywhere, and was forced to sail six hundred miles round it.

Seamen know that ice may be encountered anywhere south of the Cape during the summer. The longevity of some bergs is truly wonderful. I believe that the last iceberg seen from the Cape of Good Hope, already mentioned, was in 1850. Seven icebergs, however, some of them 200 feet high, were observed by the *Queen Mab* only fifty-five miles south-east of Cape Agulhas in 1895. This was a rare occurrence. In the South Atlantic Ocean the furthest north at which ice has been seen was 26° 30' South – that is, about the latitude of Luderitzbucht. It was not a berg which was reported there, but a piece of ice twelve feet long.

There is no ice patrol fleet – such as the seafaring nations of the world maintain in the North Atlantic – to give wireless

warning of bergs in the Southern Ocean. Some old sailors claim to be able to “smell ice” in foggy weather; others rely on the cold feel of the air, the presence of birds, the temperature of the water, or the echo of the ship’s siren flung back by a wall of ice in the neighbourhood.

Some of these methods, however, have been proved to be unreliable. A sudden fall in sea temperature, taken by a thermometer, certainly suggests the presence of ice; but it has been demonstrated that there may be no change in temperature at all with an iceberg right ahead. The air will not be cold unless the ship is to leeward of a large berg.

Echoes are certainly obtained from smooth-faced bergs; but when the ice assumes other shapes there is often no echo at all.

In the Southern Ocean, then, everything depends on the eyes of the officer of the

watch and the look-out man. When fog covers the sea and there is any reason to suspect ice, the telegraph must be rung down to “dead slow.” Ships have been saved by a quick-witted officer ringing down “full astern” in time to prevent a collision. Sometimes it is possible to hear the dreaded surf beating against the base of an iceberg. Even on fine nights ice cannot be seen far away – a berg will loom out of the darkness suddenly, like that which destroyed the *Titanic*, sending the chill of fear through all who behold it. An unseen iceberg is infinitely more dangerous than a derelict; it rips a ship along the waterline, and may send hundreds of tons of ice crashing down on her decks.

Shipmasters will tell you that they dread fire at sea more than any other peril afloat; but if you remind them of icebergs, they will place ice first.



After a collision with an iceberg... The sailing ship *Garthforce* in Durban Harbour

I was vividly reminded of the iceberg danger in the Southern Ocean some years ago when I saw a ship I knew well in Durban harbour – the fine old barge *Garthforce*. Her bows were crumpled after a collision with an iceberg – she was, indeed, a hulk, and she never sailed again. But her escape from total loss had been almost miraculous. In January, 1922, running for Australia and driving hard in heavy weather at night, she crashed full into the invisible, waiting berg. When all hands had tumbled out of their bunks the ship had recoiled; but the startled men could still see the green glimmer of the starboard light reflected by the ice. She was making water, too, and the position was desperate.

The pumps were manned while the rest of the crew cleared away the tangled mass of canvas and cordage on the shattered forecastle-head. Then a full gale blew up. With the forestay gone, it was not long

before the foremast carried away. The boats were smashed. The nearest land was desolate Prince Edward Island, about sixty miles to the north-east.

The master of the *Garthforce*, however, had no intention of abandoning his ship or running her ashore. His anxiety must have been doubled by the fact that his wife was on board. He ordered cargo to be jettisoned, and stood away from the grim face of the berg. Days of misery followed as the crippled ship drifted, rather than sailed, towards the steamer track. One night another iceberg appeared right across her course, but this danger she managed to avoid. After fourteen days the Swedish steamer *Unden* sighted the barque and towed her to Durban. The men of the *Garthforce* had to toil at the pumps all the way.

But for the skill and courage of her master and crew, the *Garthforce* might have

shared the untold fate of that pathetic fleet which has been “posted as missing” in the storm-swept Southern Ocean.

CHAPTER 5

MYSTERIES OF THE MONKEYS

“WHEN the apes leave the Rock of Gibraltar the English will leave also,” say the Spaniards. The prophecy is typical of the mysterious tradition which has grown up round these Barbary apes – the only members of their tribe found in Europe. But no one can say how they came to “the Rock,” or where they go when they vanish from their sunny playground above the forts, as they do occasionally.

There are legends, of course. A path near the summit of “the Rock” leads to O’Hara’s Tower, one of the three peaks; and near here is the great cavern known as St. Michael’s cave. Parts of this black tunnel have never been explored. Men have been lost there – and murdered. In the old days duels were fought in the entrance chamber by the light of torches. The remains of animals unknown in Europe

today were found there long ago; part of a rhinoceros skeleton, hyena and leopard bones.

Some believe that St. Michael’s Cave leads beneath the Strait to Africa, and that the apes came through the tunnel. The theory is supported, to some extent, by the fact that neither skin nor skeleton of an ape has ever been found in Gibraltar. A queer scene it suggests – the funeral procession of apes carrying their dead back to Africa.

Centuries ago the apes made of “the Rock” a stronghold indeed, showering stones on the soldiers toiling at the work of building an unassailable fortress. Though they have long been protected by the British Government, their numbers have shrunk to a mere pack. At the beginning of this century an old patriarch, the ruler of a tribe of about a dozen, killed and ate the young ones and then died.

The five or six survivors were all females, so the authorities brought a young male ape across from Africa to save the race. today there are, perhaps, a score of apes living in the most inaccessible parts of “the Rock.”

One afternoon I stood by the Southport Gate watching the apes scampering up and down the grey ledges of Charles V Wall. My friends there said that I was fortunate to see the mysterious clan; many Gibraltar residents have never caught a glimpse of them. The apes visit the western slopes of “the Rock,” visible from the town, only when the hated east wind drives them there.

In their remote fastness’s the apes live on palmetto root; but sometimes they vary their diet by raiding the gardens of date palms, apples and pomegranates. In recent years they have become pensioners of the British Government. A military officer has

been placed in command of them, and each day a soldier leaves food to the value of three pence per ape per day in a lonely spot.

Apes Hill, the ancients called Gibraltar. And Apes Hill it remains, for the lone pack is still in possession. These apes have seen “the Rock” run with blood. They watched the Moors attacking like demons under the Red Flag of Islam; the French and the Spanish beaten off by the British.

today the apes look down serenely on the jumble of cosmopolitan life that makes up this grim old outpost of Africa and the East. They are living enigmas.

2

Gorillas! They do not amuse us like the monkeys – we cannot laugh at them. In the equatorial forests of Africa the gorilla inspires terror; and we regard even a museum specimen with that uneasy

curiosity which is intelligible enough when we consider that this great creature may have shared a common ancestor with Man himself.

Ever since I met the great Carl Akeley during one of his gorilla expeditions, I have never willingly missed a tale or a picture dealing with the gorillas. But it was not until I travelled through the Congo and French Equatorial Africa that I trod the fringe of the gorilla country.

I talked there with men who knew more perhaps of the life of the gorillas and their smaller brothers, the chimpanzees, than the scientists who evolve theories of Man's origin. Lean administrators of districts, professional hunters, traders and French officers – when the raking tropical sun went down and the bottles were on the table, they told strange tales. These men left the measurement of skulls to the anthropologists. Their arguments were

based on different evidence – to my mind as convincing as any other.

It is a fact, not so astonishing when you consider the circumstances, that the men on the spot can reveal a great deal more about the gorillas than reaches the newspapers and the reports of scientific societies. They have not the skill, or the inclination, to set down on paper their experiences in the equatorial forests. It is not pleasant to be disbelieved. So they talk of the gorillas among themselves and disregard the sceptical audience of the world.

Take the well-known story of native women captured by gorillas. You hear of these victims all along the forest belt, from the Gold Coast to the Congo. There is no doubt that the apes can distinguish between a man and a woman; and that, though they often fear a man, they become suddenly bold and aggressive when they encounter a

woman alone. It is a terrible idea, and naturalists sometimes scoff at it. But men in Africa, white and black, know that it is true – they give details, dates and places.

In the Upper Tano district of the Gold Coast Colony a persistent native rumour of a “wild man of the trees” was investigated some years ago. The natives dreaded the raids of this creature – described as a white giant. He killed children and sometimes carried off a woman over his shoulder. A white hunter set out to solve the mystery, and nearly lost his life in the attempt. He came face to face with the gorilla – a white-haired specimen – and failed to kill with the first shot. Then the gorilla was on him with a roar, breaking both his arms. Weakened by the wound, the gorilla crept away soon afterwards and the hunter survived.

It is perhaps significant that many native tribes do not class the gorillas among the

animals, but speak of them, with superstitious awe, as “the hairy men.”

There is some difference of opinion regarding the ferocity of the gorilla when unmolested, though all agree that a cornered gorilla is more dangerous than a wounded lion. Often the gorilla will attack at the first sight of an intruder. The long arms reach out, and the enormous mouth is then used to maul the victim. A gorilla will fight a lion or a leopard, and sometimes emerge as the victor. The chimpanzees battle in packs, but the baboon attacks alone – his females and their young watching and waiting in the tree-tops.

Men who had shot gorillas told me that they would never fire on one again except in self-defence. The behaviour of an injured gorilla is almost human; the hunters felt like murderers.

The gorilla can never be tamed. Very few have ever been brought to Europe or

America alive, and not one has survived in captivity for more than a few years. Sixty years ago the gorilla, as far as civilisation knew, was a legend. It is only thirty years since the first mountain, or Kivu, gorilla was taken to Germany by Captain von Beringe. They live in the remote East African ranges; their life story has yet to be written. It will be a difficult study to complete. In the Belgian Congo there is a law which forbids the capture of a gorilla; and in any case they are hard to find and harder still to trap.

Mountain gorillas, the heaviest of their race, may weigh 450 lbs. They stand nearly seven feet in height, with chests twice as broad as a man's chest. The natives sometimes hunt the gorillas for meat – their flesh is remarkably good to eat.

The chimpanzee is the most intelligent animal in the world. Unlike the gorilla, he

flourishes in captivity and adopts human ways with delight. He loves clothes and soon learns to wrap himself in blankets when he is cold. Chimpanzees show their high order of intelligence in the wild, too, for they hunt and raid in packs, and unite against the lion when one member of the pack is attacked. It is often said that a chimpanzee, educated side by side with a black child, would make faster progress. One scientific school of thought, indeed, has built up a chimpanzee dictionary – a definite language of clicks and barks by which simple ideas may be expressed.

Such are the cousins of mankind, ranging the African forests in tens of thousands, offering a field of research which may one day reveal the secret of Man's origin.

I am driving fast into that empty, sun-baked corner of South Africa called

Namaqualand. My car is loaded with water-cans, spare parts and food; for if we break down in this desert country help may not reach us for days. At my side, riding the jolts of the rough track grimly, sits my sun-burnt American friend. He has been warned to expect nothing save hardship; and he has insisted on coming.

We approach the mealie fields of a lonely farm. Suddenly the brown veld seems to move, and for a second a pack of baboons at least a hundred strong turns and stares at the intruders. At the same moment the sentinel baboons give the warning. With those urgent barks the whole pack goes off at the gallop, away up the hillside, making for their holes and caves in the precipitous, rocky kloof.

It is a great sight. The wild animals of South Africa may be vanishing, year by year, before the crack of the rifle. But the baboons remain in countless thousands,

outlaws with prices on their heads, hunted mercilessly, yet surviving. They wreak havoc in the orchards, uproot young trees, kill sheep and lambs, steal fowls from the farmhouse runs. Grotesque caricatures of man himself, the baboons have made themselves man's enemy – an enemy so cunning that the cleverest traps are often useless and bullets merely cause a temporary retreat.

The baboons, unlike the gorillas of tropical Africa, have lived for a hundred years and more in close contact with human beings. They have learnt to be insolent in the presence of women, to escape when a man appears, and to run still faster when the man is carrying a gun. This may seem incredible, but the curious instinct of the baboons has been tested again and again in South Africa. I know one farmer who dressed in women's clothes and approached a pack of baboons. They fled immediately. A small boy is enough to

scare them, whereas a tall woman in felt hat and riding breeches would not disturb them at all.

There is a true story of a farmer's wife out riding on horseback not far from Cape Town, in a kloof infested by baboons. One bold male ran alongside the horse and then sprang up behind the woman. The strange motion puzzled the baboon, and he clung tightly to the woman while the horse bolted for home. It was a situation which would have been ludicrous but for the terror of the woman. Near the farmhouse the baboon realised that he was running into danger and leapt off.

The system of posting sentinels during a raid on a mealie field, already mentioned, reveals the deepest cunning of the baboon. You can always tell the sentinel baboon because his tail is bent in a loop – an unfailing sign of his alertness. Acute observers declare that the warning bark he

gives contains something more – the direction in which a safe retreat lies. It is significant that baboons always run directly away from danger, even though the approaching human beings cannot be seen by the main pack.

A baboon sentinel who fails in his duty, it is said, is cast out of the pack as a punishment. Sometimes you meet an old baboon hunting alone – an outlaw of outlaws – like an aged “rogue” elephant. Such baboons are dangerous. Hunger makes them desperate. In South Africa attacks on human beings are rare; but in Uganda the fierce baboons occasionally kill native women.

Normally each baboon pack is a well-organised army with its own recognised area. Always there is an old man baboon as leader. In Rhodesia men have watched a disciplined baboon pack surround a leopard. Commands were barked out, the

circle grew smaller, and soon the leopard was torn to pieces.

From the coffee plantations of Kilimanjaro, right down to the southern tip of Africa, men wage war on the marauding baboons. The reward for each baboon tail and scalp in some districts of South Africa is four shillings; and when the baboons become particularly troublesome the amount is raised to ten shillings. Then the farmers band themselves together and invade the remote homes of the baboons. Dogs are taken to attack the baboons in holes and crannies where no man can enter. It is a bitter struggle. The dogs are fearless – they fly at the baboons' throats and often claim many victims. But the old warrior baboons are too clever for them. They will fold a dog in their powerful arms, crushing and biting, and throw the dog over a precipice. Wounded by rifle fire, the baboon displays an almost human courage. He will struggle on, assisted by

the rest of the pack, until he drops dead. During a great hunt, a hundred baboons may be killed in a day. Yet the tribe flourishes everywhere.

Scorpions form the baboons' favourite food. You see them on the sunny heights turning the stones over in search of scorpions, and picking them up so quickly that the poisonous tail has no chance to inject the painful sting. Marvellous climbers they are – I have seen them jumping easily from a faint crevice to a ledge so narrow that no human being could find a foothold.

A mother baboon with a young one presents a human spectacle indeed. She will wash her offspring in a mountain pool exactly like a baby, and put it across her knee and spank it if there is the slightest sign of naughtiness. They have been seen using a small stick for the purpose.

A pack of baboons will swing on the fencing wire of a farm and tear it down like mischievous boys. They will steal into a field of pumpkins or water-melons and break open wantonly far more than they can eat.

In spite of their wild ways, baboons are easily tamed. The famous story of the baboon signalman at a railway station near Port Elizabeth is too well known to repeat here. Many farmers have trained baboons to act as “voorlopers” – leaders of oxen in spanned to wagons. In East Africa you may see a baboon at the head of a safari, acting as gun-bearer. But you will have no peace of mind with a baboon as a pet. A tame baboon has been known to snatch up the baby of the household and climb a tree out of reach. There, with the feverishly anxious mother watching below, the baboon slipped off the kidnapped baby’s clothes and cuddled the child close to its hairy body. It was not until the father

appeared with a plate of food that the baboon descended, raced back to the house and tenderly restored the baby to its cot.

Baboons bark at the setting sun. “Daar gaan ou bobejaan nou kerk toe,” say the coloured people of the Cape. “There goes the old baboon to church.” This custom has been held by some to be a crude religious observance. For there is no doubting or denying the human ways of the baboon. They are the highwaymen of the veld; and like the highwaymen of old, they hand in chains as a warning to their fellow thieves. Man and the baboons cannot live side by side.

4

In South Africa, and in other lands where human beings and wild animals still live in close contact, you hear legends of Tarzans in real life.

Well-authenticated reports of the wolf-children of India have been published – those tragic idiots of the jungle who yelp for food and bite their captors. I am convinced that rare cases of the adoption of children by animals do occur, and that the widespread belief in “baboon boys” in South Africa is justified.

To understand what may seem a weird idea you must picture a scene in some lonely mealie field on the South African veld. According to native custom, the women are doing the work. They are watched from a kopje, hungrily, by a pack of dog-faced baboons. Presently the leader of the pack, after a careful survey, announces in short barks that there are no men among the toilers below. The baboons go forward boldly. Among them is a female baboon which has just lost her young one – by snake-bite, sickness or in a fight with a rival pack.

The native women run terrified at the sight of these hairy invaders. One woman has left her baby in the shade of a tree while she worked. Now she hurries to the spot. The baby has disappeared. While the pack raided the mealie field, the mother baboon had heard an infant cry -not very different from the wail of her own lost one – and snatched up the human baby.

The mother-love of the South African baboon has been proved again and again. The fondness of pet baboons for the baby of the household is an undisputed fact. It is not surprising that babies should be stolen and remain hidden from human eye for many years. And it is not unnatural that a baby, kidnapped in this way, should turn for nourishment to the mother creature offering help and affection.

Such a baby would soon learn to eat most of the food beloved by the baboons. Many, no doubt, would perish during this strange

education. But the human body is made of tough material, and there would be a few survivors here and there. It must be remembered that the diet of some of the South African tribes includes snakes, lizards and locusts – it is a diet similar to that of the baboons.

The captive baby would imitate the baboons, crawling and afterwards running on all fours. Knees and elbows would become hardened in the process. (Proof that this development has occurred will be brought forward presently.) The baby would eat prickly pears, roots and the raw food of the wild. He would drink as the baboon drinks, thrusting his face into the mountain pools and lapping up the water, and from the great mouth of his foster-mother he would learn the baboon talk.

So much for theory. I have before me a photograph of a misshapen native who lived for many years exactly the life I have

described. Luke, they call him, and he works on the farm of Mr. G. H. Smith at Thornhill, in the Bathurst district of the Cape Province. This is Luke's story.

About thirty years ago two troopers of that fine body, the Cape Mounted Rifles, were riding through the rough country in that district when they encountered a pack of baboons. One man fired his revolver, and the cunning pack loped away immediately at full speed. In the rear, however, the troopers saw a limping figure. They hurried towards it, expecting to find a wounded baboon.

To their intense astonishment they found a snarling, fighting native boy about ten years of age. He was naked and covered with scars and scratches. He resisted "arrest" furiously. But the troopers knew the old South African legend, and Luke had to go with them.

In the weeks that followed Luke grew docile. He was taken from kraal to kraal in the hope that some native mother would recognise a missing child. When all efforts failed, Luke was taken to a mental hospital. It was about the only suitable place for him at that time, for his habits were entirely animal, and he could utter nothing but the grunts and barks the baboons had taught him. He displayed a huge appetite and a decided preference for uncooked foods. At the end of a year he had lost all fear of human beings, and had learnt to walk erect. That was the limit of Luke's progress.

It was about that time that Mr. Smith heard of Luke and decided to adopt him. On the farm Luke became much happier; and in the course of years he picked up a little English. It is, perhaps, the most striking feature of the whole affair – this obvious lack of any known language revealed by Luke. And it is almost tragic that, having

learnt to speak, Luke's dim intelligence did not allow him to give to the world an account of the life of the baboon such as no scientist could ever hope to write. But that is the position. Luke's memory has failed him.

Across Luke's forehead runs a deep scar. "Big bird kicked me," he says. That is his whole past, as he remembers it, from birth to the age of ten years. The bird, of course, must have been an ostrich; and anyone who has seen an ostrich lunge forward with its battering-ram of a leg will marvel that Luke was not killed outright. Possibly the experience accounts for Luke's loss of memory. Doctors who examined him found that Luke's leg had been broken years ago, and had set almost perfectly. But of this Luke, remembers nothing.

It was a hard task training Luke as a farm labourer, but Mr. Smith succeeded, Luke is tremendously powerful – he can lift heavy

grain sacks and chop more wood in a given time than any other man on the farm. His hip muscles are developed, through running on all fours, to the degree one would expect. Luke's story provides, I suppose, the happiest ending possible in these strange circumstances. There must have been many others who did not fare so well.

For there is scarcely a baboon-infested district of South Africa or Rhodesia without its legend of a "baboon boy." There are stories of white men who have gone to live with the baboons – men such as that frenzied creature which the old Bulawayo stage coach encountered on the veld years ago. But that is a story difficult to accept. Of Luke and the rest of the sad company of native children adopted by the baboons there can be no doubt.

Down at the southern tip of Africa there is a lost tribe of baboons. They roam the mountains that drop sheer to the sea at the Cape of Good Hope, cut off for ever from all the other monkey folk of the continent.

This pack has been isolated for more than a century. Look at the map, and you will see how Cape Town has grown like a barrier between the baboons and the hinterland. During that time the baboons have adapted themselves to their territory – an island as far as they are concerned. They have learnt to scoop fish out of the seaside pools, and to break open shell-fish. No other baboons in Africa live in this way.

They are bold thieves when hungry. One night as I lay asleep in a cave near Cape Point they crept past me and stole the fish I had caught before supper. But only when desperate will they invade the outskirts of Simonstown, the naval port. They have

been seen climbing the wall of the naval dockyard. Once, a few years ago, they raided the gardens – nearly two hundred of them – and naval seamen had to be rushed up the mountain slopes to beat off the attack.

The baboons, however, have been protected by the Government, for they are an asset to Cape Town. Tourists motoring out to Cape Point often see them scampering across the road, or sunning themselves on the rocky krantzies. Some Americans call them gorillas, and are delighted to have encountered them. Fortunately there is little fear of the tribe dying out – almost every female carries a baby on her back.

The lighthouse keepers at Cape Point know the lost tribe well. Sometimes they hear a scratching at their window-panes; and when they shine a torch on the glass there

is a hairy dog-faced baboon peering into the room.

Oom Piet, as the people of Simonstown call him, is the leader of the lost tribe. A great grey old male – nearly fifty years old he must be – five feet in height with large yellow fangs. He has maintained his place by sheer strength, over ambitious young baboons who would have robbed him of his harem years ago if they could have defeated him.

The Cape Point baboons are certainly among the most intelligent of their kind. They seem to realise that they are protected; for nowadays, when motor-cars dash along the famous drive through their domain, they do not vanish among the rocks. At a respectful distance they sit calmly, helping each other to find fleas, while the little ones play strangely human games. A naughty youngster will sometimes fling a stone at a passing car; but



Cape Point Lighthouse, South Africa.

that, and their occasional raids in search of food, make up the total of their crimes.

It is said that when a baboon breaks the law of the lost tribe, a court-martial is held on the seashore. Certainly they have been seen, barking and gesticulating, in a grim circle around one cringing member of the tribe. According to local legend, a verdict of guilty means that the doomed baboon must plunge into the cold South Atlantic, there to perish in the breakers or in the jaws of sharks. Several men declare they have watched this dramatic form of execution.

These lost baboons are the only protected baboons in a land where their tribe causes such havoc that whole packs must be killed every year if the farmers are to survive.

Like the apes of Gibraltar, thousands of miles to the north, the Cape Point baboons have earned the right to live. It is fitting that the old Africa of the days before the

white man, came should linger at this southern extremity of the continent.

CHAPTER 6

WHO WAS GEORGE REX?

FRAGMENTS of the fascinating story of George Rex are known to many people in South Africa, and to a few, in high places, in England. The full romance of that Royal exile of Knysna, son of King George III of England, can never be told. It has gone; perished in fires, lost with men and women long dead, suppressed and forgotten. I can give only an outline of the life of this astounding character, gathered at Knysna with the aid of George Rex's descendants.

The story opens in London about the year 1756, when there lived at the corner of Market Street, St. James's Market, a beautiful girl named Hannah Lightfoot. She was known as the "fair Quakeress," for she served in the shop of her uncle, a Quaker linen draper named Wheeler. Hannah Lightfoot often caught the eye of Prince George (afterwards George III,

King of England) during his walks and rides from Leicester Square to St. James's Palace. One historian remarks: "She soon returned the attentions of such a lover."

They were married – secretly, but legally. One account states that the ceremony took place in Kew Chapel, afterwards destroyed by fire with the marriage register. It is also said that Curzon Street Chapel was the scene of the marriage, that the Rev. Alexander Keith officiated, and that James, Duke of York, the Prince's brother, was present.

The romance of George III and Hannah Lightfoot has often been confused with the lighter love affairs of George IV with Mrs. Fitzherbert and Perdita Robinson. Nevertheless, it is clear that George III did marry Hannah Lightfoot – the marriage certificate was copied many years ago by a Mr. Bull – and that a son was born.

This son took the significant name of George Rex. He seems to have been a dutiful young man, much attached to his Royal father; and he went into voluntary exile at the time of the first British occupation of the Cape to avoid complications in England. George III must have settled a small fortune on George Rex, besides granting him the post of "Marshal of the Admiralty at the Cape."

Rex bought land in the "Table Valley," probably about the year 1796, and carried out his duties in the Vice-Admiralty Court, which dealt with pirate ships and foreign vessels seized by the British as prizes of war.

Then came the return to Dutch rule for a few years, and George Rex had to sell his property under the proclamation of Governor Janssens. When Popham and Baird seized the Cape again in 1806, Rex found himself without residence or

occupation, though possessed of ample means. He was an energetic man, and an idle life in the gay Cape society of those days did not appeal to him.

By this time rumours of the richness of the district near the mouth of the Knysna river had drifted to Cape Town, and Rex decided to make his home there. The journey of more than three hundred miles was a serious trek indeed at that time, especially as Rex meant to establish himself as a Squire, and live in luxury, at this new South African settlement near the great forests.

One can easily picture the cavalcade of wagons, coaches and cattle that swung out of the shadow of Table Mountain under the leadership of George Rex, bound for the distant Indian Ocean coast. Rex was accompanied by his wife and four children, a retinue of friends and followers, builders and craftsmen and hundreds of slaves. It is

said that Rex himself travelled in a coach bearing the Royal Coat of Arms, and drawn by six white horses.

The sea voyage to Knysna would have been much less arduous, but at that time no vessel had entered the Heads and anchored in the calm lagoon beyond. The harbour was thought to be unsafe.

Knysna in those days must have seemed to the exiled George Rex like a corner of England – an impression which this green forest country still leaves in the minds of travellers. The river and the woods were gorgeous with bird life, from egret to flamingo. Huge elephants and buffalo were seen in the forests. The veld was alive with buck and pigmy antelope.

There is a pretty legend that Rex was authorised to claim all the land he could see from a high point near the river mouth. This, unfortunately, is pure fancy. Rex was granted a large farm, and he soon

purchased from their owners those other famous properties which he called Melkhout Kraal, Eastford and Westford. His whole domain covered 20,296 acres, and included much valuable forest land.

George Rex, undoubtedly, was a man who would now be described as “the right type of settler.” Melkhout Kraal, where he built his mansion, became an outpost of civilisation in that wild territory. “It is more like a Fairyland than an ordinary South African cattle run,” wrote one early traveller.

Rex was also an affectionate father. His children were taught mathematics, French, Latin, drawing, music and dancing, several tutors having come to reside at Melkhout Kraal. Most of the amenities of cultured life were to be found there. Everyone dressed for dinner at night. The “Old Place,” as Melkhout Kraal was afterwards called, was famous as a mansion where

visitors received the most lavish hospitality.

As the years passed, the Rex family grew until there were six sons and seven daughters. Edward, the eldest son, was slightly deaf, and never married. John Rex, the second son, “a man of princely manners and conspicuous ability,” became his father’s right-hand man, and made a name for himself as an explorer of unknown parts of the Cape coast.

Some of the daughters were sent to Cape Town to finish their education; and most of them married into noble English families. Though the “Old Place” was far from the aristocracy of the Castle in Cape Town, many gallant young officers and high officials journeyed to Knysna and were entertained by George Rex. There was, for example, Lieutenant (afterwards Captain) Thomas Duthie of the 72nd Highlanders, who married Caroline Rex; Captain John

Fisher Sewell, who married Maria Rex, and Mr. Atkinson of Armagh, who became the husband of Sarah Rex.

The “Old Place,” like the daughters, grew in beauty year by year. Gardens with rare plants were laid out. A watermill and a blacksmith’s shop were built. Orchards, vineyards, orange trees and avenues of oaks appeared. Mulberry trees were planted, and it is recorded that Rex sent 12 lbs. of silk, spun by his daughters, to London.

Rex kept ostriches on his farm – several well-known early travellers mention the fact. It is probable that such an enterprising man exported feathers; and in that case he would be the real founder of the once great South African industry.

His diary, like so many other treasures of the “Old Place,” was destroyed in one of a series of disastrous fires. A few scraps remain, however, and give vivid glimpses

into, the daily life of this busy man. He speaks of sealing expeditions to Plettenburg Bay, elephant hunts, the visits of ships – and letters from Cape Town ruined in the post-bag by a broken flask of brandy. There are frequent entries telling of foals killed by “wolves,” which were, of course, spotted hyenas.

Among distinguished visitors was the Earl of Caledon, in 1811, who presented Rex with a silver cup. Lieutenant Foster, R.N., with his wife and child, were guests at the “Old Place” after the wreck of H.M.S. *Emu* – the first vessel to enter Knysna harbour. You can still see the bones of the *Emu*, almost buried in a sand-spit, at low tide, though the ship was lost in 1817.

Dr. James Barry, the woman who worked at the Cape as a physician disguised in male clothing for many years, was another visitor who stayed in that hospitable mansion. She once accompanied Lord

Charles Somerset, who was the guest of George Rex on several occasions.

After the “Old Place” had been destroyed three times by fire, George Rex moved to the “New Place,” later called Rexford. There he continued to lead his polished life, a man of great dignity, but with secret sorrows and, perhaps, ambitions unfulfilled. He used to wander in the solitude of his fine garden, hands behind his back, hearing voices from far away and answering them aloud.

“No, no, Your Grace, I cannot agree with you.” Then a silence.

“Yes, Your Royal Highness, I think I can do that.” George Rex must have left many good friends in England. Once he received word that an East India Company’s ship, with a number of these friends on board, was bound for Knysna. He must have waited eagerly for them, happier than he had been for years; for his friends would

sweep away some of the longings of an exile and bring back the dead past.

The ship arrived and anchored far out, off the open coast near Knysna. A crowded boat came surging in over the heavy swell; and the heart of George Rex must have beat faster as he watched. Imagine his horror when the boat broached-to in the surf and every soul was drowned! He buried them with his own hands and returned to the “New Place” a lonely man...

It was after this disaster perhaps that Rex started his campaign to persuade the Admiralty that Knysna was a safe harbour. He surveyed the lagoon, found that there was sufficient depth of water on the bar to allow ships to enter, and charted a deep channel for miles up the river. With the aid of this information, shipmasters lost their fear of the narrow entrance between the rocky Heads. Old records show that from

1817 to the time of Rex's death in 1839, a total of 162 ships visited Knysna; and there were only four wrecks during that period.

Delays in exporting timber owing to a shortage of coastal shipping led Rex to build a vessel of his own. He sent to Simonstown for a shipbuilder, caulkers and indentured servants skilled in the work; and in 1826 the keel of the brig *Knysna* was laid. She was built of stinkwood – the teak of South Africa – and fifty years later she was still afloat as a coal carrier along the coasts of England.

It was in this little ship of 140 tons that John Rex explored little-known stretches of the coastline between Cape Town and Durban. The *Knysna* was the first vessel to enter the Buffalo river, where East London now stands. It seems a pity that the name Port Rex, given to the harbour by John Rex, should have been forgotten. Other voyages, as far east as the Isle of France



Entrance to the Lagoon at Knysna, where George REX made his home.

(now Mauritius) and as far west as St. Helena, were made by the *Knysna* before she was sold.

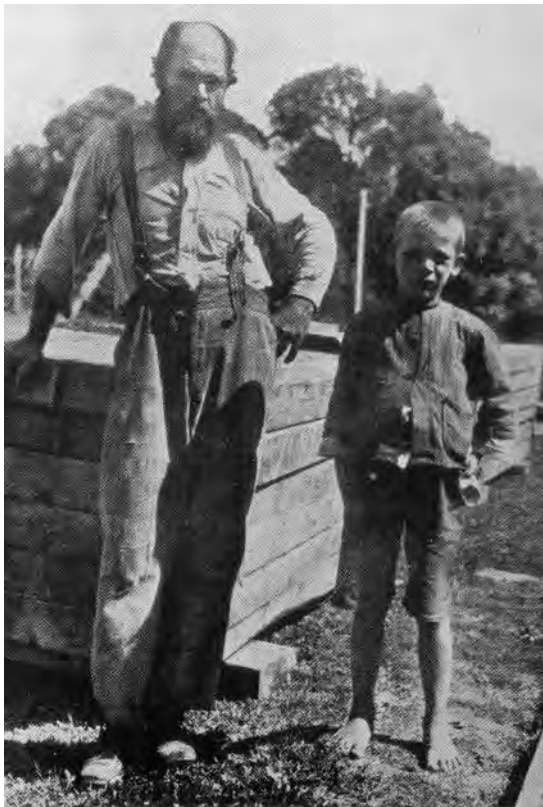
The people of Knysna walked in heavy rain, some of them for twenty miles, to attend the funeral of George Rex in April, 1839. One newspaper obituary notice paid the greatest tribute of all to the royal founder of the town. "He left no enemy behind."

People who knew George Rex, and whose words have been handed down, declared that his face was exactly like that on a George III coin. Those heavy Hanoverian features could not be mistaken. The likeness to members of the Royal Family still persists. I was shown several heavy, velvet photograph albums of the Victorian era – a startling collection indeed of portraits of men in tightly buttoned coats, with beards or side-whiskers, and women in the skirts and hats which seem so quaint

today. They were descendants of George Rex; but if I had known nothing of this story I would have recognised their likeness to the House of Hanover, without hesitation.

Royal interest in the Rex family has not lessened since the death of George Rex. When the Duke of Edinburgh visited Knysna in 1864, to shoot elephants, he chose no one but Rex men to form his personal bodyguard during that memorable adventure. Mr. George Rex, fifth son of the founder, was appointed "Captain of the Hunt," while another Rex carried the Duke's 18-lb. elephant gun.

There have been other Royal visitors to Knysna since then; and all of them have shown that they were familiar with the story of George Rex. They have examined the relics which escaped the fires – those old, romantic things which are not made today. I saw them, and handled with a thrill



**One of the primitive wood-cutters of Knysna
with his son.**

the ebony baton, mounted with a silver crown, which was the symbol of George Rex's office as Marshal of the Admiralty. There is a medallion with a bust of George III by Wedgwood – a delicate and valuable relic. A rosewood chair which Rex brought out from England with him. Some wine glasses, many coins, and a seal engraved "Though lost to sight to memory dear," which was handed to Rex by George III as a parting gift when he left England.

During the South African War, when General Smuts and his commando were reported to be planning an attack on Knysna, many of the most valued Rex possessions were buried. On this occasion, as on many others, those who hid them could not locate the exact spots afterwards. Parchment manuscripts, including George Rex's commission as Marshal of the Admiralty, were found – all blank when taken from the earth.

There is still old silver under the Knysna soil; and even in recent times the plough has still turned up a few ornaments of long ago in the fields where once the “Old Place” stood.

Other lost possessions are remembered by members of the Rex family still living. There was a harp, which was played by one of George Rex’s daughters while the others sang “She wore a wreath of roses,” and songs of those days. A spinet with tiny feet, made to stand on a table. A musical box which played “Pop goes the weasel.” There survives a Wedgwood jug which the old slaves, Caesar or Cupido or Adoons, would fill with water several times a day for their master. And a case of stuffed English birds, marvellously preserved.

That is all I can tell of the story of George Rex, a gentleman who left behind a tradition of kindness and courage worthy of a king, though he ruled, not a great

country, but only a wild corner of South Africa.

CHAPTER 7

STRANGE ISLAND OUTPOSTS OF AFRICA

GIVE me charts and sailing directions, and I can cover the Indian Ocean in an evening. My charts are crossed by the tracks of old voyages, stained by the careless hand of the sea; but when I unroll them I can smell the tropic isles at dawn again, and see them, all green and white and living against the restless blue of the ocean.

Mauritius, Reunion, Round Island and Bassas da India – names engraved on paper and written boldly across the back doors of my memory. The trade wind beats against my face again when I see the harbour of Port Louis, Mauritius, on that chart. Abdol, my boatman, blackfuzzed and grey-bearded, is at the gangway calling his morning greeting: “Salaam, sahib!”

Across the molten gold of the harbour we pass, until I step ashore in Port Louis – a sweltering Eastern city with that flavour of Paris which the gracious French have given to so many distant seaports. Here fat Hindoos sell bowls of rice and beans, while Chinese in European clothes stand in doorways decorated with paper lanterns. On a Saint’s Day I saw a Roman Catholic procession, with robed and mitred priests leading a choir of Mauritian creoles. And high on the plateau where the yellow sugar cane grows I visited the old French aristocracy of the island in magnificent country houses like Labourdonnais-places with broad verandas and green blinds, shining lawns, a busy sugar mill close at hand.

Hard by Mauritius is Round Island – only one mile long, but with a character of its own. Landing is difficult. You row in close to a table rock and one man jumps for the flat surface carrying a line, which he



Street scene in Port Louis, Mauritius.

makes fast to an iron ring. The island is slashed across by deep fissures, where wild goats leap and rabbits swarm. There are no snakes in Mauritius; but on Round Island the poisonous Colubra snake, coloured red, white and blue, flourishes and threatens the visitor. It does not retreat when attacked, but rears its head and fights.

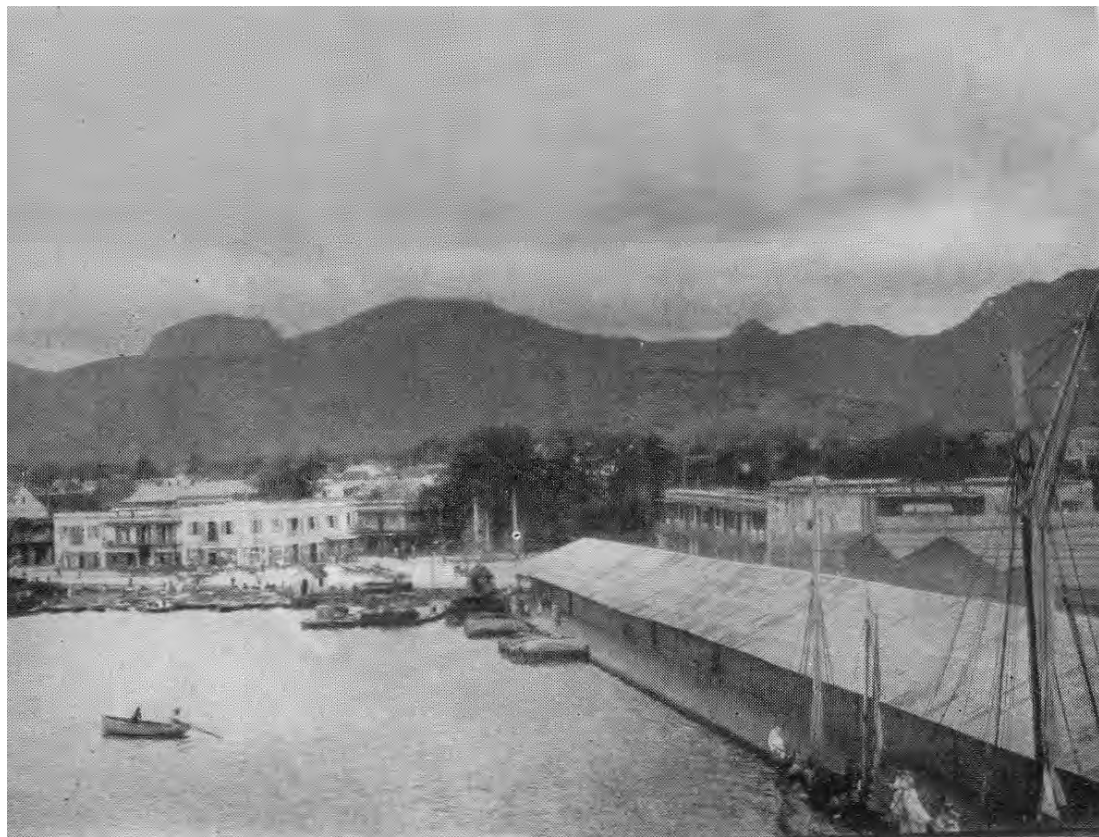
The privateers who careened their ships along the Madagascar coasts late in the eighteenth century left many a legend of hidden treasure. On Round Island, it is said, there is a fortune in pearls and Spanish doubloons awaiting discovery. One treasure-seeking expedition from Mauritius was marooned on the island for weeks during the heavy weather. They lived mainly on cabbage-palm and seabirds' eggs; and they found nothing but a few skeletons.

Reunion is the island of exiles. It has taken the place of St. Helena in our modern

world, for the French send dangerous political prisoners there – men like the fearless Abd-el-Krim, once leader of the Riffs. It is an idler's paradise. The French settlers and half-castes who are at home on Reunion, and the noble company of beachcombers, are seldom disturbed by events in the feverish world outside. Sugar cane, one of the easiest to grow of all tropical crops, covers the mountain slopes. Mangoes, bananas, fish and chickens are so abundant that no one goes hungry.

Generations of sleepy folk have produced startling mixtures of race and colour on Reunion. You see blue eyes set in ebony negro faces, and Chinese eyes and cheekbones beneath flaming red hair. *Demain* (tomorrow) is the watchword of this pleasant isle.

Between Reunion and Madagascar, alone in mid-ocean, uninhabited Tromelin Island rises out of the blue expanse. It is away



The waterfront at Port Louis.

from all the usual sea-tracks and trade routes – one of the last islands of the Indian Ocean to be placed on the chart.

Nearly two hundred years ago the French man-of-war, *Utile*, was sailing through the night, bound for Reunion, her captain never dreaming of the mass of sand and coral lying across the course. When the lookout-man sighted breakers ahead it was too late. The *Utile* stove in her planking on a fringe of coral reef and foundered. About sixty sailors and a number of black women – “stowaways” the official record called them – reached the island in safety.

Fifteen years passed before the castaways of Tromelin Island sighted a sail. By that time all the seamen had died, and there remained only seven women. On this little island, half a mile wide and one mile long, the survivors – scorched by the sun and fearful of cyclones – lived on fish and

brackish water. Captain Tromelin, who rescued them, gave the island his name.

Some of these islands have provided fortunes for the discoverers – or the traders who followed. Christmas Island, for example – discovered in the seventeenth century and colonised only fifty years ago. The island had been the resort of sea-birds for ages, and they had left a rich covering of guano. today there is a white staff in the settlement at Flying Fish Cove, and a thousand Chinese coolies work the phosphates.

Assumption Island is another of these treasure rocks made valuable by countless millions of birds. Here there is no harbour, so that ships must lie on the lee side of the island according to the monsoon prevailing, and the guano is taken out in canoes. This island has two peculiarities. The usual typical acrid smell of guano is absent – all the ammonia must have

evaporated long ago. And the water surrounding the island is so clear that you can see a ship's anchor a hundred fathoms away.

All these isles have their own spell for the wanderer; but the most romantic – in possibilities, at any rate – are those little coral islets without settlements or even occasional visitors. Such a place is Bassas da India, a circular coral reef enclosing a green lagoon without an entrance. Surveying ships of the British Navy have called there – no other vessels ever anchor off the island. When H.M.S. *Osprey* surveyed Bassas da India in 1883 a schooner, keel up, was seen in the lagoon. It is easy to picture the disaster. Driven before a gale, the ship must first have struck and then have been carried clear over the reef one dark night, to rest, a shattered hulk, in the calm water. Not a soul could have lived to report the wreck.

It was in a ship chandler's shop in Port Louis that a coco-de-mer was thrust into my hands for the first time. I had come on shore with the captain, so that in those surroundings I was in favoured company. A ship chandler leads up gradually to the main business of selling marine stores. He has only to clap his hands, and pleasant drinks appear; and he fascinates his customers with interesting gossip.

The magnificent specimen of the famous coco-de-mer was intended as a gift to the captain. I do not remember how many sacks of sugar and drums of paint were purchased afterwards; but I have vivid memories of that queer double coco-nut and the ship chandler's stories of it. Some of his information, indeed, was so remarkable that I checked it afterwards in conversation with naturalists who knew the Indian Ocean islands. The ship chandler, I found, had told

nothing more than the truth about this fruit which some believe to have come out of the Garden of Eden.

The first coco-de-mer to be discovered by Portuguese explorers was seen floating in the Indian Ocean far from land. They realised at once that they had found something new. This brownish black nut, a foot long and deeply cleft in the middle, was different from any other coco-nut they had encountered. There were really two nuts growing in one immensely hard shell; and the whole coco-de-mer, had they known it, formed the largest and heaviest fruit in the world.

So the Portuguese sailed on, discovering isle after tropic isle, casually seeking the home of the coco-de-mer without success. When they reached the long coral chain of the Maldiv Islands they learnt that the light-skinned, intelligent islanders were familiar with the coco-de-mer. A few nuts

washed up on the beaches of the atolls every year at the time of the south-east monsoon, and were taken immediately to the Sultan of the Maldives.

Precious flotsam, indeed, for the coco-de-mer was not merely food and drink like other coco-nuts – it was the fruit of long life. Indian princes paid handsomely for it; they use it as medicine to this day. Some of the first specimens taken to Europe were sold for £300; and long afterwards the price remained steady at £100.

The search for the home of this mysterious nut went on so long that scientists came to the conclusion that it grew in the depths of the Indian Ocean. It was a difficult theory to make plausible, but several attempted the task. Not until 1789, nearly three hundred years after the discovery of the first coco-de-mer, were the beautiful fan palms bearing them found in the Seychelles Islands.

The Seychelles, an archipelago of ninety-odd islands, are fragments of the lost continent of Lemuria, which was submerged when the Indian Ocean was formed. Only on two islands of the group, however, do the majestic coco-de-mer palms grow – the *Lodoicea Seychellarum* in the language of the botanist. On Praslin Island there are two small valleys where these giants flourish; and there are more of them on the fertile north shore of Curieuse. Nowhere else in the world can you pick the sea coco-nut. All attempts at transplanting have failed.

There are more than three hundred species of palm in these tropic isles, but the coco-de-mer alone is protected by the Government. Pirates swigged the milk of these nuts centuries ago, little knowing that a cargo of coco-de-mer would be worth more, in an Indian port, than a looted ship. Once the nut came into demand as a remedy for senility, the trees were robbed

unmercifully; and without the wise protection which they have received for many years now, the coco-de-mer would have become extinct. The hard wood of the trunk, rising seventy feet to a green, feathery summit, used to be cut up for building purposes.

The nuts hang in clusters, from three to six nuts in each, below the huge leaves. A nut takes seven years to ripen, and may then weigh as much as fifty pounds. Male and female coco-de-mer palms grow in the glorious wilderness of bamboo, cinnamon, Areca and sago palms on these two islands. The male produces a cone six feet long with yellow flowers, and the female has buds as large as an orange. Lizards and other creatures carry the pollen from the male tree to the female bud.

The famous General Gordon was once stationed in the Seychelles; and he was among those who believe that these happy

islands were once the Garden of Eden, and the coco-de-mer palm the tree of knowledge.

today the girls of the Seychelles will sell you wickerwork and fans made from the leaves of this palm. Now that there is no fear of extinction, the polished nuts fetch only a few rupees as curios. You may eat turtle in the Seychelles, and fish cooked with the island spices, and pigs fattened on coco-nuts. But you will taste no more romantic food than the almost tasteless gelatine from the nut of the coco-de-mer.

There is a legend of a man-eating tree in Madagascar, close to the Seychelles. That is a fairy tale, while the story of the coco-de-mer is one of the most fantastic realities in this world of bewitching islands.

Every group of isles in the Indian Ocean has its own story, its atmosphere of old adventure or present romance.

Just north of the Equator lies the string of atoll islands, hundreds of them, named the Maldives. Here dwell a seafaring native people who have inherited from their ancestors a remarkable skill in making and repairing nautical instruments.

A strange trade, surely, for brown-skinned men who might reasonably be expected to know more about gathering coco-nuts or spearing fish than the intricacies of navigation. But these sailormen of the Maldives were trading with Ceylon and the Malabar Coast in the days when the ancient Britons were painting themselves blue. They learned the use of the backstick, the cross-staff and the astrolabe from the early Portuguese explorers; and they copied these instruments so cleverly that



A Sugar mill in Mauritius.

today you will still find astrolabes of the old type in use in the ships of these islands. From time to time books of tables reached the Maldives. The patient little islanders studied them and translated the rules into their own language. On many of the atolls you may enter a hut and find an instructor lecturing to a class of young seamen on nautical astronomy!

A civilised people indeed, though they live in the tropical heat of the Equator with the warm sea washing their very doors. Life goes easily in the Maldives – coco-nut palms, banyans, bread-fruit trees, limes, pineapples and sugarcane provide abundant food. Bonito fishing is the chief occupation of the islanders – one boat may take a thousand in a day.

Many sailors have happy memories of these friendly islands; for centuries the islanders have taken shipwrecked men into their homes and cared for them. Serious

crime is unknown in the Maldives. There has not been a murder for many years, and even thefts are rare.

Some of the women are light-skinned and beautiful. Persians and fair Circassians settled there long ago; and here and there among the islanders you will find pure examples of the types.

Ruled by a Sultan, a Prime Minister and a Council of Nobles, the Maldivians would make a fascinating study for scientists interested in the survival, in lonely places, of old civilisations. Though they are under British protection, there is no interference with their own affairs. No cruisers steam to these peaceful isles to settle a revolution. Every year the Sultan sends his ambassadors to the Governor of Ceylon to present a tribute of cowrie shells, fish and cakes. The islanders are lightly taxed, the chief of each atoll sending a fraction of the produce to the Sultan every year.

In their own vessels of a hundred tons and more the Maldivian islanders sail the Indian Ocean. Their methods of navigation are, perhaps, the last relics of the science which the bold Portuguese struggled to perfect when they sailed off the charts of the known world.

4

On my Indian Ocean chart they appear under the resounding name of Cargados Carajos Shoals – a group of reefs and islets jutting only a few feet above the surface of the sea. “Isles of Death” sailors call them. Dozens of ships have been lost on these coral fangs; treasure ships from China and the Indies, pirates, corsairs, privateers...

They lie alone in the great waste of ocean to the north of Mauritius, these Isles of Death. Yet, in spite of the cyclones which sweep the low beaches with hard-driven seas, men maintain a precarious foothold

there. For these shallow waters form a rich fishing ground, and the turtle come in their thousands to lay their eggs on the sandy shores.

I see the unofficial Governor of the Isles of Death occasionally when he calls at Table Bay on his way out to his lonely domain. Sometimes he sends me a parcel of dried turtle meat as a reminder that the shoals have not yet been engulfed. He is Commander J. E. Capstickdale, a man of world-wide adventures, known everywhere he sails as “Cappy Ricks.”

On one of his visits he spoke of the dark and mysterious past which he has glimpsed in these isles. “A scientific expedition ought to be fitted out to explore that group,” he declared. “I have seen ships’ anchors through the clear water on the reef – anchors that must have been there for hundreds of years. And rusty metal, relics of East Indiamen; old timbers covered with

coral, and fragments of wreckage. Why, my islands reek with romantic history that has never been investigated and written.”

The Isles of Death lie athwart the old sailing trade routes – visible, in clear weather, at a distance of only eight miles. At night a ship out of her reckoning would not sight the low-lying reefs until it was too late to put about. Inevitably she would join the dead ships, lost with all hands, that found their graves there since the earliest days of Indian Ocean voyages.

It was a vivid and more pleasant picture that “Cappy Ricks” painted of his isles. “I have the finest job in the world,” he told me. “My company owns all the fishing rights in the group, and I have forty Mauritian fishermen at work there all the year round. By the Living Harry, those fellows are kept busy – I work them to the last gasp. But they earn high wages and they live like princes. The islands have the

healthiest climate in the world. The trade clouds roll across a blue sky, the great ocean swell thunders on the barrier reef, and in the calm lagoons drift the canoes of the fishermen. The isles are emerald green with palms, brilliant white when the sun is on the beaches, set in a sea like blue silk.”

There are about thirty coral islets altogether, curved in a half-moon twenty-six miles from tip to tip. Only one small islet, St. Raphael, is inhabited by the fishermen. Here are houses, and sheds for drying the fish; a cement tank for storing rainwater and a grove of casuarina trees. Some seaman with imagination surely named the other isles – Mapare and Avocare, Albatross, Siren and Pearl. Then there is Frigate Island, with its conspicuous white mounds of guano, swarming with rats.

To most of these tiny refuges in mid-ocean the turtles come to lay their eggs, each

female leaving hundreds in the sand. Largest of all are the leathery turtles, with shells four feet long, sometimes weighing a thousand pounds. Many captured on the shores of the Isles of Death, or harpooned in the shallow lagoon, weigh five hundred pounds.

The hawksbill turtle visits the group, too, providing the busy fishermen with what we call tortoiseshell. There is little waste in this industry. Turtle flappers, carapace edges, flesh – all are salted and sent off to Mauritius when the schooner calls. “I have eaten turtle every day for weeks and never wearied of it,” says “Cappy Ricks” with enthusiasm. “Flavoured with spices, Amontillado, onions and cayenne pepper, the soup is superb.”

In the islands “Cappy Ricks” is known to the fishermen as “the man who will not admit that the sun will rise tomorrow”; for he believes in finishing a job before he

goes to bed. Occasionally, however, he finds time to fight the giant sail-fish of those waters – fish which weigh three tons and can be caught by an expert on rod and line.

When I last saw “Cappy Ricks” in Table Bay he was bound for his beloved isles in a tiny steam trawler, purchased in England – the *Fume*, of forty tons. In this cockleshell “Cappy” and a crew of nine voyaged ten thousand miles, not without adventures due to heavy weather.

The classic small boat passage between the Isles of Death and Mauritius, of course, was made by the open cutter of the wrecked East India Company’s ship, *Cabalva*, in 1818. Survivors of this disaster. were flung on to the islets at night, and saw no hope of rescue from the isolated group. Casks of beer and cases of wine had drifted ashore. The sailors were roaring drunk, the position desperate.

Accordingly an officer and eight seamen set out for Mauritius in the cutter, provisioned with bottles of brandy, eight gallons of water, pork and cheese. They made Port Louis after a squally passage of 250 miles; and soon afterwards a British frigate set out for the Isles of Death and picked up the remainder of the castaways.

As “Cappy Ricks” points out, there are many other pages in the grim story of his isles which are lost and cannot be written. I think that if I wandered under the palms of those Cargados Carajos Shoals at night I should hear more than the drone of steady trade wind in the groves. Voices of pirates, quarrelling over blood-stained gold, would mingle with the cries of the birds. And ghostly galleons would go past in the moonlight, crashing to destruction on the great reefs that encircle the Isles of Death.



A café in Elizabethville.

Seldom does a ship from Aldabra Island come into Table Bay Docks. One I recall, a little black French steamer that plainly had voyaged long under tropic suns. Her decks swarmed with tortoises – food for the crew of black, brown and yellow men of the Indian Ocean islands.

A tired white mate, wearing a tar-smeared sun-helmet, leaned over the rail. He spoke English, and soon I was informed that his own hobby was not natural history – he preferred whisky, unlike most of his wine-drinking compatriots. But if I was interested in tortoises... He led the way below and showed me the strange coral atoll called Aldabra on the chart.

Aldabra is the only spot on the globe where you find the enormous elephant tortoise. Darwin described giant tortoises which he observed in the Galapagos group far away in the Pacific. But the four

varieties of Aldabra tortoises – *Testudo elephantina*, *gigantea*, *hololissa* and *Daudini* – are a race apart.

There are two mysteries about these tortoises which remain to be solved. First, their age. It is probable that there are tortoises still living on Aldabra which were there when the first white explorers landed on the island four centuries ago. Methuselah, an elephant tortoise which was presented to the Johannesburg Zoo by the Governor of the Seychelles a few years ago, was known to be two hundred years old when he was sent to South Africa; and he is still in his prime. This tortoise, incidentally, was the largest specimen ever shipped away from Aldabra – the weight was more than three hundred and fifty pounds.

And this brings me to the second mystery. The mate of that French steamer declared there were much larger tortoises than

Methuselah on Aldabra. The island, on the eastern side, is covered with mangroves. Coloured men from the Seychelles who have settled on Aldabra say that deep in this thick bush there are antediluvian creatures so large that it would be impossible to ship them away. The bush where they live is a maze of broad paths, flattened by the lumbering tortoises as they pass from their hiding places to the water-holes and the sand-dunes where they lay their eggs.

Few scientists have ever landed on Aldabra. The largest tortoises of all are seldom seen by human eye. Who knows what relics of the dawn world may still exist in the dark undergrowth of Aldabra Island?

Sailors have plundered the stronghold of the tortoises for scores of years. It is recorded that in 1847 the crews of two ships caught 1200 tortoises within a short

time. They formed the ideal "livestock" for the men of the sailing ships. Exposure to all sorts of weather did not trouble the tortoises. They were regarded as a certain preventive for scurvy. And one tortoise often provided a couple of hundred pounds of meat tasting exactly like a good beef steak. The mate of the French steamer, with all the Gallic appreciation of a tempting meal, told me that not in Paris will you find a more enjoyable dish than the roasted breastplate of a tortoise.

In spite of all these raids on the Aldabra tortoises, there appears to be no danger of extinction. They breed fast, laying dozens of eggs the size of cricket balls for the sun to hatch out. When the little tortoises emerge, sea-birds prey on them; but there are many survivors. As long as the deep jungle of the island remains, the tortoises will resist all attacks on their numbers. Their diet is simple enough, for they feed

on the fruit of the screw palm and decaying undergrowth.

Thousands of the smaller tortoises of Aldabra have been transported, from time to time, to the Seychelles. The Seychelles islanders have a pleasant custom of marking a young tortoise when a baby is born, and killing the tortoise for the wedding feast when the son or daughter is married. The luscious flesh is often used for soup, tortoise soup being practically as delicious as the more famous turtle.

The men who live on Aldabra sometimes hear a weird roaring noise at night; almost ghostly it must sound on that lonely coral atoll so far from the mainland of East Africa. Then they know that the mating time has come, and that the great male tortoises are calling to the smaller females. It is a call that is heard only on this remote isle, and, as I have said, on the other tortoise islands of Galapagos.

Two or three times a year a schooner from the Seychelles calls at Aldabra and loads a cargo of mangrove bark, green turtle, *bêche-de-mer* and tortoises. But their tackle will not allow them to haul on board the real monarchs of the island – those ancient tortoises of the impenetrable bush on the eastern shore. Here indeed is a naturalist's paradise, offering the chance of a discovery which might startle the scientific world.

6

Along the fever-haunted Madagascar coast men tell strange tales of the lone island of Juan de Nova – and the strangest tale of all is true.

Juan de Nova is ruled by dogs. It lies out in the Mozambique Channel, seventy-five miles from the coast; a low, sandy island with a tall and solitary tree to guide shipmasters to the anchorage.

When I sighted the island years ago there was a steamer off the south point. At first she seemed to be waiting there for a cargo; but presently I saw that no smoke rolled from her funnel and no one moved about her decks. The *Tottenham* was her name – the last of a long line of ships which have left their bones on that grim island.

I do not know whether the dogs have ever boarded the *Tottenham* in search of loot; but certainly they have made Juan de Nova their kingdom. In the days of sail many ships – pirates and honest traders – called there for fresh water, fruit and turtles. When the first Portuguese caravels arrived more than four centuries ago, Juan de Nova was a bird island. Cats from wrecked ships, and rats, preyed on the birds. Then dogs were marooned there, and they waged war on every living creature.

Today there are few cats or rats, but many dangerous packs of dogs hunt in the bush

and along the beaches of the flat island. A hideous mongrel horde they are, though their ancestors may have been thoroughbreds from Europe and China. Every colour is represented; a trace of a mastiff here, a bulldog there. They droop their tails like wolves – these fierce dogs of Juan de Nova are no longer the friends of man.

Indeed, real peril awaits the crew landing without firearms. Men from a French schooner ran their boat up on to the beach some years ago to fill their water casks. Immediately the packs of dogs rushed forward to the attack, displaying such reckless ferocity that the seamen were driven off. Only when a second boat arrived were they able to obtain water – covered by a continuous fusillade of rifle fire.

When there are no human invaders on Juan de Nova, the dogs battle among

themselves, pack against pack. During the centuries each pack seems to have laid claim to a certain hunting area on the island – a beach where sea-fowl may be killed, or a dune where turtles' eggs may be devoured. A dog which crosses one of those invisible frontiers is torn to pieces by the pack in possession.

On moonlight nights the dogs may be heard calling to each other on a high-pitched, eerie note. They lost their homely barks when they returned to the law of the wild.

The Sakalava natives of Madagascar call the island Randanova, and relate weird stories of the place. In the old days they used to make adventurous voyages to the island in their canoes, returning with cargoes of turtle. On shore they worshipped the huge Adansoma tree which stands out from the thick tangle of palms and mangroves. But they visit Juan de

Nova no more – the army of dogs is too strong for them.

Even the buccaneers of old were scarcely more dangerous than the present inhabitants of Juan de Nova.

7

Most fascinating of all the lone islands in mid-ocean are those with traces of some old and mysterious settlement. Such an island is St. Paul, far out in the South Indian Ocean – the island that does not like to be visited.

Nearly a hundred years ago there was romance and tragedy on St. Paul; a story which can be only half-told, with a climax which we must imagine for ourselves. And recently history repeated itself, though there were survivors to relate the whole ghastly affair.

I first heard of St. Paul Island, and the man who set up his strange kingdom there,

while visiting Mauritius some years ago. The fishermen of Mauritius and Reunion make daring voyages in their small schooners across hundreds of miles of stormy ocean to fish in the teeming waters off St. Paul Island. I listened to more stories of the lonely place when a sealing steamer came into Table Bay after a season on this and other islands.'

My old blue-back chart gives a fine idea of St. Paul – a chart made by Captain H. M. Denham, R.N., of H.M.S. *Herald*, in 1853. Lying midway between the Cape and Australia, St. Paul is only two and a half miles long and one and a half miles broad. But it is one of the world's most remarkable islands. Once a volcano, the whole cone slipped back into the sea, ages ago, so that the crater has been breached by the sea. There are other formations of this kind in different parts of the globe, but St. Paul is probably the most perfect example.

The crater, of course, is now a circular lake, with a sunken barrier, on the eastward side over which small craft can pass at high water. Just outside is a shoal of which the chart says : "Abundance of fish and crayfish may be taken here." The shores, rising to a height of eight hundred and sixty-two feet, are precipitous. Apart from the entrance into Crater Lake, there is only one landing-place. Heavy surf lashes the volcanic rocks that surround it. Sulphurous fumes issue from the cliffs.

An eerie place for a lone castaway St. Paul would be. Water bubbles out of the soil, hot and smoking; unpleasant to drink until you become accustomed to it. There are no trees. Ferns, mosses and cabbages are found, however, and these formed valuable items in the diet of many shipwrecked men on St. Paul when scurvy might have been an ever-present menace.

With wild goats, rabbits, sea-birds and huge penguin rookeries, St. Paul has supported colonies of castaways for long periods. Cats are also found burrowing with the Island rabbits – the descendants of cats left by the first settler on the island.

He was a French aristocrat from Madagascar (so the fishermen of Mauritius told me) and he decided to settle on St. Paul because his exploits as a smuggler and freebooter had got him into trouble with the French authorities. His wife sailed with him, and history relates that she was beautiful. The rest of the crew of the freebooter's sixty-ton schooner consisted of two white men, a coloured boy and fourteen troublesome Malagasy natives.

This ill-assorted party were real – not legendary. Sailing ships bound to Australia last century often passed close to St. Paul, and sometimes hove-to while their captains landed on the island. Thus details of this

first settlement are to be found in the carefully preserved log-books of ships that have now vanished from the seas.

The Frenchman set his natives to work building houses of volcanic rock. He sent them out fishing and sealing, grew vegetables and raised herds of goats. The schooner carried salt fish and sealskins away to Table Bay and Mauritius. In spite of the loneliness of St. Paul, the Frenchman did not encourage visitors. It is recorded that he entertained one master mariner to a luxurious meal of rum, roast fowl and brandy; but he never divulged his name, and he was unwilling to supply fresh provisions.

For a time the exiles gave their ruler no trouble. When they appeared restless and bored within the monotonous walls of the crater, they received a ration of wine and tobacco. It was not long, however, before signs of mutiny arose – not only among the

blacks. An island kingdom of eighteen men and one woman cannot continue indefinitely.

Details of the tragedy will never be known. When the schooner returned from a voyage to the Capes he found not a living soul on St. Paul. The houses had been gutted by fire. There were a few new graves.

Some years afterwards St. Paul became the temporary home of nearly six hundred men. In June, 1871, a British transport, H.M.S. *Megaera*, bound to Australia with troops, was in the vicinity of the island and leaking badly. Desperate efforts were made to keep the ship afloat – the soldiers baled with buckets while the sailors manned the pumps. The rust-eaten old ship was settling down so rapidly, however, that the captain decided to beach her on St. Paul to save life.

With the engines going full ahead, the doomed *Megaera* was driven in towards

the crater entrance. There she remained for some weeks, so that her shipwrecked company were able to salve all the necessary stores and sufficient coal to keep themselves warm during the winter months they remained on the island.

Two Frenchmen were stationed on St. Paul at that time, filling casks with fresh water for the whalers which called there regularly. They were of great help to the castaways; but nevertheless the maintenance of such a large number of men must have provided a difficult problem for the officers. A flag-pole was immediately erected and the ensign flown upside down – the distress call of the sea. Men posted on the lookout saw several ships pass the island; but at first none saw the signal.

At the end of a month – when all the glamour of a Robinson Crusoe existence had departed – the Dutch barque *Aurora* sighted the reversed ensign and stood in

towards the island. One of the military officers, a Lieutenant Jones, rowed out to her and was seen to board her. Then, to the intense disappointment of the eager crowd on shore, a sudden gale arose and drove the ship out of sight of St. Paul.

During August another Dutch vessel called. She was too small to take off the whole body of castaways; but she relieved the situation considerably by sending supplies on shore and carrying a number of sick men away with her.

The men who remained eked out their supplies by fishing, hunting the wild goats and digging potatoes planted by the first French settler. They found the clay of the island made a remarkably good substitute for soap – it lathered well. They were able to cook their fish in the boiling thermal springs which they found in the sloping walls of the crater.

It was not until three months after the loss of the *Megaera* that a steamer arrived, with Lieutenant Jones on board. She was followed by H.M.S. *Rinaldo* and the P. and O. liner *Malacca*. Even then the rescue of the marooned men could not be carried out immediately, for one of the frequent hurricanes of those latitudes prevented the small boats going out. Within a few days, however, St. Paul was again deserted, save for the two Frenchmen. Not a life was lost during this whole adventure.

Three years later a party of French astronomers settled on the island for a few weeks to observe the transit of Venus. They left a small monument – certainly one of the loneliest in the world – to mark the event.

Shrouded in mist, unlighted and often difficult to discern even in daylight, St. Paul Island caused the loss of many good ships. One of them was the British barque

Holt Hill, which ran blindly on to the west side of the island one dark night in 1889. The crew climbed the steep cliffs to safety, and were rescued after a stay of only eight days.

The fishermen from Mauritius and Reunion used to moor their schooners in Crater Lake – a dangerous bowl of water at times when the gales whirled round the sides of the cone. Somewhere below the lake lies the broken hull of the schooner *Décidée*, which parted all lashings in a hurricane, was thrown on to the shore, and foundered. Sailing out of Crater Lake when heavy weather threatened was a task calling for seamanship of the highest order; and the fishermen told me of many narrow escapes from destruction.

The fishermen sailed to St. Paul so regularly years ago that they used to leave their open boats on the island between seasons. In 1903, H.M.S. *Terpsichore* found four

strong boats in good condition on the beach. They were still there when the S.S. *Wakefield* called in 1910 to search the island for possible survivors of the ill-fated liner *Waratah*. Probably the abandoned boats are still there today.

Shortly after the loss of the *Holt Hill*, the island (and several more in the South Indian Ocean) was claimed by France. The Tricolour was raised there in 1892 by men of the cruiser *Bourdonnais*; and the S.S. *Eure* arrived the following year to establish a provision depot for shipwrecked mariners. They built a stone hut with a thatched roof and stocked it with a most impressive larder. There were 1323 lb. of preserved beef, 1102 lb. of biscuit, shirts, blankets and matches, all securely packed in tar-covered barrels. Seven of the casks remained unopened in 1910; it was suggested that seal poachers had carried off some of the supplies. Re-stocking these lonely depots is a difficult and expensive business, as ships

cannot often be sent specially for the purpose. There is a sort of unwritten law that when a shipwreck occurs, the nation to which the castaways belong shall take the first opportunity of sending out fresh supplies. Warships and exploring vessels often undertake the task.

The latest chapter in the story of desolate St. Paul is, as I have suggested, strangely like the first. In 1928, I watched a small French steamer, the *Esperance*, leave Table Bay for St. Paul with a cargo of stores and coal. She was one of a small fleet of vessels employed by a French company in sealing and fishing; and her special purpose was to establish a crayfish (or lobster) canning factory on St. Paul.

For several years the enterprise prospered – the people of France love canned lobster, and import it from many parts of the world. A small short wave wireless station was erected at the St. Paul factory; and this

undoubtedly saved the lives of some of those on the island. It was in May, 1931, that a dramatic call for help came from this station. Of the 132 people employed there, a quarter were suffering from beri-beri – a disease similar to the dreaded scurvy of the old days.

Two vessels of the French company were sealing in far southern waters when the distress call was received. The nearest was the steamer *Austral*, and she steamed at full speed to St. Paul. Thirty deaths had occurred before she arrived. The victims were nearly all Madagascan natives, of whom there were a hundred on the island. It seems that these primitive labourers had disregarded the orders concerning their diet; they had eaten too much white rice instead of the “red rice” which prevents beri-beri.

There was a woman on St. Paul at the time of this outbreak – Madame Burnou, widow

of a former manager of the factory. She had seen tragic happenings indeed on that island. Her baby had died a few days after birth. Her husband had died in her arms during a previous epidemic. She had seen a man, maddened by sickness, swim out to a rocky islet and perish there alone. Another, a sailor named Peter Quillivic, had dressed himself in his Breton costume and paddled out in a canoe, never to be seen again.

And now Madame Burnou faced the scourge of beri-beri, nursing the sick and scanning the horizon anxiously for the smoke of the rescue ship. When the *Austral* arrived, it was decided to abandon the island. One disaster had followed another, and the experiment had proved a costly failure.

So once again the winter snows of St. Paul are untrodden by human feet. The strange island rises grimly out of the ocean in that immense solitude, repelling visitors in

spite of the provision depot and the empty buildings. Ice-cold seas break over the crater entrance where the old *Megaera* went down. Goats, rabbits and penguins invade the little stretch of land where so many unhappy settlers lie buried.

A mysterious, sinister place is this sunken crater in midocean. If I am ever tempted to end my days far from civilisation on some remote isle, I shall take out my chart and prick another, happier spot. Too many ghosts haunt St. Paul.

CHAPTER 8

MORE ISLANDS OF MYSTERY

NEW scents and brilliant colours, shaded plazas and cool patios, rough cobbled streets, terraced gardens, purple bougainvillea, bananas, oranges these are the impressions of the passenger who spends a morning on shore in Las Palmas or Teneriffe.

The scientist sees the peaks of the Canary Islands as sign-posts above the greatest mysteries of African seas. These "Fortunate Islands" set him riddles he cannot answer. Who were the Guanches – the people found on all the islands when the first explorers arrived? Were they the survivors of the lost continent of Atlantis? Was this the Garden of Eden, swallowed up in the convulsion that gave rise to all mankind's legends of the Flood? In one of the almost inaccessible caves of the

Canaries, perhaps, the old secret will be revealed at last.

For centuries the Canary Islands were the very edge of the known world. They are recognised easily enough in the writings of Herodotus: "The world ends where the sea is no longer navigable, in that place where are the gardens of the Hesperides, where Atlas supports the sky on a mountain as conical as a cylinder."

The smoke of the volcanic Peak of Teneriffe was visible from the coast of Africa. It is clear that the ancients sailed in this direction on voyages of discovery, and that the Romans landed on the archipelago centuries before the French and Portuguese expeditions which brought news of the islands to Europe. Arab records, indeed, state that Admiral Ben Farroukh landed there in A.D. 999.

Reliable information of the Guanches, unfortunately, is available only from the

time of the Spanish invasions towards the end of the fifteenth century. The Guanches were then a pure race, living in the Stone Age – tall, well-built men, and, according to the Spanish sailors, beautiful women. In the more remote islands the Guanches were fair; while those of Fuerteventura and Lanzarote, which are about eighty miles from the African coast, had darker faces, suggesting a Berber or negro influence. It is thought that the Guanches were allied to the Basques and Celts of Western Europe.

Golfo, the food of the Guanches, is still the diet of the poor Canary islanders. It is simply grain toasted and ground with salt added. Mixed with water and eaten in lumps, like dough, golfo is a plain and nourishing food.

The Guanches resisted the Spanish invasion vigorously. The warriors of Teneriffe kept the Spaniards at bay for years, until a mysterious disease called

“modorra” – possibly typhus fever – broke out among them. Then they retreated to their caves to die. Some of the survivors were shipped away as slaves; others married Spaniards; but the race ceased to exist.

There must still be traces of Guanche blood in the islanders. The present-day inhabitants have mingled with other peoples to such an extent, however, that nowhere is it possible to identify a Guanche type. Only by the mummies in the Las Palmas museum may we know this vanished race.

Let us make the round of the seven islands and seek in each the mysteries that still linger. First Teneriffe – you can see the snow-clad cone more than a hundred miles away in clear weather. In the sleepy old town of La Laguna, five miles from the port, there is a Dragon tree which was old

when the Spaniards came – according to island legend it is six thousand years old.

Valleys of lava, black cinder-heaps and craters remind us that Teneriffe has known many volcanic eruptions. It is possible that the island will blow up one day like Krakatoa, for the volcano is active enough. In 1909 the islanders were startled by loud detonations and earthquake shocks; and soon afterwards a new crater opened twenty miles from the peak.

As you travel through the country-side you observe many old wine-presses, silent and abandoned. Seventy years ago “Canary sack” was a famous wine; but disease ruined the vines and the industry has lost its importance.

Near Oratava is the scene of a romantic legend – the miracles of the Virgin de Candelaria. A shepherd, it is said, found an image of the Virgin in 1400 on the sandy beach. Some say it was a ship’s figure-

head, washed ashore from a wreck; but the image was credited with the power to cure illnesses, and from all the islands people came to worship. Once it was stolen and taken to Fuerteventura. It was restored, however, and remained on the beach for many years. In 1826 a great gale swept the island and the image was carried out to sea. A new image, sent by the Pope to replace it, stands there today.

In Grand Canary the cave dwellings of the Guanches are most numerous. There the soft sandstone cliffs are honeycombed with the retreats of the Guanche troglodytes. Some of the very poor people of the island still inhabit caves; for there is no tax to pay if a house has no door. You realise what splendid mountaineers the Guanches must have been when you visit these grottoes. The strongholds may be reached only by narrow ledges along the faces of the cliffs – no one but an expert climber would dare to enter them.

La Palma is the most beautiful of the islands. The Gran Caldera, seven thousand feet deep, was once the cauldron of a volcano; now there are green trees at the bottom. In a *barranco*, or ravine, on this island stands the stone ship which draws Spaniards from all parts of the world to a religious festival every five years.

Gomera, with its sheltered port of San Sebastian and rich lands, has been coveted and attacked by the fleets of many nations – Spanish, the English under Sir Francis Drake, Dutch and Moorish. This was the favourite harbour of the old navigators, including Columbus; many a Portuguese caravel and Spanish galleon set out from there for coasts unknown and seas uncharted.

The people of one remote district of Gomera possess a whistling language – a means of communication found nowhere else in the world. The villages are sepa-

rated by ravines, so centuries ago the whistling language was invented to send messages. It may seem incredible, but a good whistler can make himself heard four miles away. The islanders do not use their fingers – the wind rushes through their teeth and is controlled so skilfully that complicated messages can be transmitted and understood.

Fuerteventura is a large island, but remains in a primitive state owing to the almost entire absence of fresh water. During a rainy year, however, wonderful crops of wheat are raised. Here camels may be seen on the farms – the only form of transport possible in dry seasons.

Lanzarote, too, has desert stretches resembling the Sahara. There was a volcanic eruption in 1824, when showers of red-hot stones were blown out of a new crater. On this island an execution pit is preserved – a relic of the grim days when a

condemned person was left to die of hunger or thirst. The choice of food or water was given. It is said that one wily criminal chose milk, and remained alive for so long that the custom was abolished.

Hierro, last of the seven islands, used to be regarded as the most western point of the world. To the botanist it is the most interesting island of all, for the population is small and there is a wealth of plant life.

Some of the Canary islanders will tell you they have seen an eighth island to the westward of the group – the miraculous island of St. Brandon. Many early explorers sought for this terrestrial paradise; and belief in its existence was once so firm that when Portugal ceded the Canaries to Spain in 1519 the *isla nao truvota* (island not found) was included in the treaty. The mystery is easily explained, however, for reliable observers have seen mirages on the horizon from La Palma and

Teneriffe – mirages so clear-cut that they could well have been mistaken for land. But do not contradict the Canary people when they speak of St. Brandon. With them it is an article of faith.

Pleasant folk are these Canarios, with friendly ways. As you pass them where they sit eating in the open they hold out food hospitably. They have seen tremendous changes in the prosperity of the islands. At one time land was so precious that an acre of good ground fetched £2,000. In times of depression, thousands have emigrated to Cuba.

All the Spanish amusements may be seen in these islands – cock-fighting in the spring, bull-fights, carnivals and battles of flowers, wrestling and, in recent years, the sport they call futbolismo. In the gay streets you may see a girl talking to her lover through the *postigo*, the hinged shutter that is a relic of Old Spain.

Labourers in some of the remote districts are still paid in kind – one *almud* of maize for a day's work.

In the “Fortunate Islands “grow the best oranges in the world. The deep water surrounding the archipelago is considered to be the world's finest fishing-ground. The tomatoes have a wonderful flavour, bananas flourish wherever irrigation is possible, vines grow among volcanic slag.

Such are the “gardens of the Hesperides,” where man may have risen from barbarism to civilisation, only to perish in the flood that left these peaks as the last sign-posts of a drowned continent.

2

At the gang-plank of the slaving brigantine stood the priest. Roped neck to neck, the slaves stumbled on board. A flick of sea water, a crack of the *capitao's* whip, and down to the dark hold went each new

convert, bound for the great cocoa island of Fernando Po in the bight of Benin.

Fernando Po! For a century the plantations flourished on slave labour and human misery. The sea-roads from the Angola slave ports to the harbour of Fernando Po is littered with the bones of those who suffocated and died and were jettisoned. Their descendants may be seen in the coast villages of the island to this day – a queer stew of black and brown types, mixed with freed slaves from Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and the Brazils.

The approach to this island which has seen so much suffering ranks in sheer beauty with the Straits of Messina and the entrance to Rio de Janeiro. I came up from the south in a French liner, steaming through the channel, eighteen miles wide, between the island and the West African coast. To starboard Cameroons Mountain rose boldly from the sea to a height of

nearly fourteen thousand feet; to port, jungle-clad, magnificent, were the twin island peaks – Santa Isabel, more than nine thousand feet high, and Misterio, “the peak with a secret,” almost as tall.

These green giants of the tropics brood over craters and crater lakes, dense bush that has never been surveyed, and queer native peoples. No wonder you hear legends of men with horns and men with tails in the remote forests of Fernando Po. One tale, I know, is true. The Bubis of the island, a shy and naked race, cannot talk to each other in the dark – they must use their hands to assist their language. The Spaniards who now own Fernando Po, have never been able to take a census of the Bubis; some of their strongholds are inaccessible. They are not black, but coppery in colour, different in language and appearance from the natives of the neighbouring mainland tribes. Possibly the Bubis are the remnants of some forgotten race which found refuge on the

island when they were driven out of the Cameroons. Their faces are slashed with tribal markings, and they worship the devil.

Discovered by the Portuguese and passed on to the Spaniards, Britain took possession of Fernando Po in 1887. Under a peculiar arrangement the British “superintendent” was given a Spanish commission as Governor. Fernando Po became a base for capturing slave traders. Many English-speaking slaves settled there when they were free, and English is still their language.

The island was returned to Spain in 1844, but for years attempts at settlement were disastrous. Garrisons mutinied, more than half the Spanish settlers died during the first year, sleeping-sickness took heavy toll of the labourers in the cocoa plantations. For a time it was an island of exile for political prisoners. The natives rebelled against Spanish rule, and the Spaniards hunted

them with bloodhounds – conciliation was unknown in those days.

Modern medical science brought prosperity to Fernando Po. When you enter the colony today you must have your blood tested for sleeping-sickness; and the test is repeated frequently. Early treatment has effected many cures. Rewards are paid to the natives for dead tsetse flies – the source of infection.

The pretty seaport of Santa Isabel, once a plague spot, is now a town of white houses with green jalousies on the summit of red cliffs. Neat gardens, paved roads and electric lighting have appeared. The heat is almost intolerable, however, and the Spanish officials have made Basile, at an altitude of a thousand feet, their headquarters. Clarence Cove, the harbour, is a sunken crater, breached by the sea so that large steamers may enter the circular anchorage.

The whole island is wonderfully fertile. Many of the plantations are worked by Roman Catholic missions; but there are Spaniards, Portuguese and Germans in the trade. Labour has always been the chief difficulty. The black republic of Liberia now supplies the demand, and still one hears an occasional outcry against “forced labour.”

Annobon, another Spanish island to the south, is a settlement of the descendants of castaways. Four hundred years ago a Portuguese schooner, bound from the Congo to Brazil with slaves packed under her hatches, struck a reef off Annobon. The slaves swam ashore rejoicing, found the island to their liking and remained there.

Today the Annobon islanders trade in cocoa, pigs, fowls, pineapples, limes, oranges and tamarinds. Money has little or no value. They take in exchange old

clothes, guns, spirits and tobacco. Besides cultivating the rich volcanic soil, they are expert whaler men, hunting in the old-fashioned way with open boats and harpoons flung by hand.

Four Spanish priests are the only white men living on the island. Germany tried to seize Annobon many years ago; the natives still talk of the forcible attempt to “hoist the black eagle flag,” which was opposed by a priest, who ran up the Spanish flag in protest.

In the tropics a man who lives forty years is reckoned an old man; but Annobon is healthy compared with the mainland, and many aged natives are found there. The waters round the island teem with fish, and a hook baited with a red rag is seized voraciously. Many poor communities in more civilised lands might well envy the black castaways of Annobon.

North of Annobon lies the Portuguese island of St. Thome, a green island wrapped in haze with the climate of a hothouse. Only during four months of the year – the blessed *gravana* season from May to August – is the place dry and healthy.

“Pearls of the Ocean” the Portuguese call St. Thome and the neighbouring isle of Principe. They are beautiful enough with their ravines and rivers; but the two thousand white people who live there like the view from a homeward bound steamer best.

The Dutch were the first to settle at St. Thome. Then the French sacked it. There were so many slave risings against the next owners, the Portuguese, that many sugar planters emigrated to Brazil, taking their machinery with them. Cocoa of fine flavour grows on the island today.

Fernando Po, Annobon, St. Thome,
Principe – they are off the track of the
mail-boats and the tourist ships. Dark
islands with dark pasts.

CHAPTER 9

WHERE DO THE WHALES BREED?

EVERY summer an armada leaves Table Bay. It is a sight that draws soft-living men and women away from well-laid hotel tables to watch the ships as they steam along the water-front. A black fleet against a golden sunset – the great mother ship leading, the whale gunboats strung out in line ahead and swaying to the long seas that come up unbroken from the Antarctic.

I have friends in that fleet. One is a gunner who has taken me out hunting with him off the South African coast; a man who earns, in a good season down there in the south, three thousand pounds. Another man has borrowed my camera, so that though the reality of this adventure is denied to me, I may see the ice barrier, the icebergs and the bearded Vikings at war with the whale.

Yet this is the right kind of war. It calls forth all the skill and courage of the crews

– Norwegians almost to a man – who steam south year after year to that frozen battlefield. It is fought with wireless and explosive harpoons. But it is waged so that humanity may have soap and margarine, oil and phosphates. There are giants on both sides; the huge, good-natured Norsemen with their wonderful physical strength and power to endure the grey skies and the gales seventy-five degrees south; and opposed to them, showing almost human cunning at times, are the largest animals in the world.

The ships, too, are marvellous. “A steam whaler,” the Norwegians say, “will stand more than the nerve of man will put her to.”

On board these ships the talk is all of whales. I have listened to the deep-chested Norwegians discussing their inexhaustible subject while they gulped the raw potato spirit called aquavit and smoked their long

cigars. The whale is the most mysterious creature in the seas of the world. Research ships have been sent out to investigate the migration of the whales, their pairing and breeding habits, and the secret breeding place which it is so important to discover if the species is to be protected against extermination. British scientists in charge of this work believe that observation over a period of twenty years or more will be necessary before the life story of the whale can be written.

Since I first cruised in a steam whaler years ago in the month of May – when the blue whales, finners and humpbacks, appear along the coasts of Africa – I have often wondered how many valuable secrets of whales and the Antarctic generally are stored up in the heads of Norwegian sailors. From information and scraps of genuine experience gathered in mess-rooms, chart-houses and on swinging bridges at sea, I am certain that much more is known about the

mystery of the whales than you will find in any published work. There is a good reason for this secrecy, and to understand it you must look back through the history of whaling and remember how Norway captured one of the greatest industries in the world.

It was the invention of the deadly Svend Foyn gun, fired from the pursuing ship itself and not from the old open boat, that altered the whole course of whaling. Captain Foyn, the Norwegian inventor, placed in the hands of his countrymen a weapon which brought them millions of money and the control of whaling enterprise in all the oceans. For a high degree of skill – ranking, perhaps, as hereditary skill – is needed to hunt the whale in the modern way. The Norwegians have kept their knowledge almost entirely to themselves; and who can blame them? Today their mastery of the craft is such that British marine insurance firms quote a lower

premium when a whaling factory vessel bound for the Antarctic is commanded and manned by Norwegians.

The Norwegians are the true explorers of the Antarctic. Remote islands, bays and coasts which, if they appear on the charts at all, are but vaguely indicated, are well-known to the whaler men. In their tireless search for new whaling areas they penetrate waters never seen hitherto by the eye of man. During one of those rare "open seasons" in the south when the seas are free from ice, they must make important discoveries. There must be fascinating charts of new land, roughly drawn, no doubt, in the pocket-books of Norwegian gunners. But they do not tell. I once knew a skipper who had hunted over most of the world's whaling grounds – a Norwegian sailor man with a University training. He wrote a book on whales; but he told me that there were some things which he could not put in that book. There is something

akin to freemasonry in the Norwegian secrecy about the Antarctic.

Let us consider some of these mysteries and see whether we can lift the veil which hangs, like a great white fog, over the frozen south.

For many years scientists have been trying to discover whether the whales found in the Antarctic spend all their long lives south of the Equator, or whether they visit the Arctic regions. Marine biologists will tell you that there is no definite proof as yet of this migration. They say that it is probable, because whales caught in both hemispheres carry similar parasites and barnacles. A research ship has been given the difficult task of firing darts into whales in the Antarctic so that some satisfactory record of their movements may be obtained when the marked whales are ultimately captured. The success of this experiment obviously depends on the

number of whales existing in the world. Some experts say there are but ten or twelve thousand left. The Norwegians declare that there must be a million or more left – that they are hunting only on the fringe of vast herds. As it is impossible to fire darts into a very large number of whales, a long period may elapse before the track of the wandering whales can be charted. I believe that up to the present not one marked whale has been killed. Yet one modern factory ship consumes more than five hundred whales – blubber, flesh and bone – in the course of a single Antarctic season.

This mystery of migration is one which the hard Norwegian seafarers solved long ago to their own satisfaction. When they first opened up the Antarctic hunting-ground they caught whales in which they found old corroded harpoons and lances of many types. The scientist, of course, might point out that the bold American and British

whalers – known as “spouters” and “blubber-waggons” – had been operating in southern waters almost ever since Captain Cook reported the presence of whales there in 1775. Though these vessels seldom crossed the Antarctic Circle, they might easily account for harpoons found in whales much farther south. But the Norwegians know their own harpoons, and the lances used by their grandfathers in northern waters. They know that during the lifetime of a whale – some say a thousand years – it may visit every ocean in the world.

Now we approach a dark secret indeed – the secret breeding-place of the whales. I shall hazard a guess about this Solemn spot presently. In my mind’s eye I see a small wooden steamer (double-skin oak, she was, to resist the ice) straining at a rickety wharf in Table Bay Docks. I have been on board many exploring ships; chatted with Wild and Worsley in the *Quest* and Sir

Douglas Mawson in the old *Discovery*; but never did I find a greater atmosphere of secrecy than that which clung to the stout wooden timbers of that wooden steamer. She was the *Norvegia*, fitted out by a Norwegian whaling firm to circumnavigate the Antarctic Continent. A remarkable voyage they made in her, too, though few details appeared in the newspapers. The object, it was officially stated, was “partly commercial and partly scientific”; but not until sometime afterwards did the fact emerge that there were political motives as well. Then it was announced that Captain Harald Horntvedt, master of the *Norvegia*, had annexed Bouvet Island on August 31st, 1927, and hoisted the Norwegian flag on shore in accordance with authority given by his Government.

Britain at first resisted this claim by virtue of the “occupation” of Bouvet Island by a British shipmaster, Captain Norris, more than a century ago. Norway, however,

displayed extreme anxiety to gain possession of this island, the very position of which was uncertain until quite recently. The Norwegians argued that Captain Norris placed Bouvet in the wrong position, and that he might not have landed there at all, but at Thompson Island about forty-five miles to the north-east. (It has since been proved that Thompson Island does not exist.) A further point made by the Norwegians was that the British occupation had not been effective, whereas the *Norvegia*’s scientists and crew remained there for about a month, catching a few whales and taking eight hundred fur seals on the island.

The dispute would probably have gone to Geneva for settlement; but the British Government decided to waive its claim in favour of Norway. After all, what is Bouvet Island worth? It has the peculiar distinction of being the most isolated island in the world. Within a radius of a

thousand miles there is no other land at all. The island is simply a steep volcanic cone almost entirely covered by a glacier.

Norway's new colony on the edge of the Antarctic immediately faded out of the searchlight of international politics. Behind the scenes, however, little time was lost in arranging an expedition to Bouvet Island. Two of the finest air pilots in Norway were sent down to the south to survey this lonely outpost and the surrounding ocean from aloft. About this time, in fact, there was much Norwegian aviation in the Antarctic. Little was heard of it. The flights of Byrd and Wilkins, and the discoveries they made, were chronicled by wireless day by day. The Norwegian machines flew secretly, and we know little beyond the fact that one sea-plane set out and never returned.

Another Norwegian expedition was ordered to set up a wireless station on

Bouvet Island, and scientists planned to settle there for a year – an unenviable task. The party left Cape Town with many tons of equipment, and I know that they landed on the island. But soon afterwards they reappeared in Cape Town, hurrying back to Norway, silent about their adventure. “We have received strict instructions to say nothing about our work,” they declared.

What is the explanation of all this feverish Norwegian activity and anxiety to obtain possession of ice-clad Bouvet Island? As a whaling base it is useless, for there is no harbour. I believe the Norwegians have learnt the secret of the breeding-place of the whales, and that place is Bouvet Island. With the flag of Norway flying on the island, the Norwegians control the very source of the industry which has enriched them for so many years.

Someday, perhaps, we shall know what ambergris really is – that precious lump of

fatty substance which is found in old white-headed sperm whales, and is believed to be the product of a disease. A piece as large as a sponge is worth thousands of pounds. But I suppose that no scientist will ever learn why a harpooned sperm whale, spouting blood, turns in its death flurry always towards the setting sun.

Yes, those are queer tales that the men of the whaling armada bring up from the ice – the “south ice” as they call it. I should like to read those other tales that are seldom told and never published; secrets filed away in Government offices and the headquarters of the great whaling companies in Norway. Then some of the mysteries of the leviathan of the seas would be mysteries no longer.

CHAPTER 10

CAVE MEN AND HALF-CASTES

IN AFRICA, more easily than in any other continent, you may turn a strong search-light back through the mists of Time. Strange groups of early men you glimpse – if you have the imagination to clothe skeletons and fill long-abandoned caves with hungry hunting parties.

But there is one more interesting quest than this; a quest which is not so fantastic as it may seem. Donald Bain, the South African hunter and desert guide, put me on the track of it when he returned to Cape Town some time ago after an expedition into the unmapped Kaokoveld territory in the north of South West Africa. *Are there descendants of those early men still living in that unknown corner?* An astounding discovery it would be, but not an impossible one, as I shall demonstrate.

During his trek through the Kaokoveld, Donald Bain met an aged Herero head-man named Thomas. And Thomas – whose information usually proved reliable – spoke of a lost tribe of *wilde bosmannetjes* living along the distant coast of the Kaokoveld. No white man has ever trodden this lonely shore; it is cut off from the interior by a great desert, and there are no harbours at which a ship might land explorers. A few airmen have flown down the coast; I know that one of them observed signs of life in a territory which, officially, contains no inhabitants. Here, then, according to Thomas, dwell people who have been isolated for hundreds of years – people who have had no contact with civilisation.

From the description given by Thomas, Donald Bain had no difficulty in identifying them with the mysterious Strandlopers – the beachcombing forerunners of the



Donald BAIN, the South African hunter and explorer, with two Bushmen

Bushman and the Hottentot in South Africa.

Now there were many shy races encountered by the early explorers, and the most elusive of all were the Strandlopers. We know something of their lives and customs as a result of excavations in the seashore caves they inhabited, and in which they left their bones. But the only account of a meeting between Strandlopers and white men, I think, is the report made by Colonel Gordon on his return from the Orange River in 1779. On the banks of the river, near the estuary, Colonel Gordon found the bones of baboons and other animals – the remains of a feast. A little further on he came upon huts in which the framework was made of grampus skeletons. Eleven wretched human beings presented themselves. They indicated by signs that the place had been the home of a large tribe; but that some pestilence had carried off all the rest.

These people wore sealskins and jackal skins. They caught fish; and when a whale was cast on shore they ate the meat long after it had decayed. Water they carried in ostrich egg shells and seal bladders. Bows and arrows were their weapons. Their bodies were smeared with oil. Unfortunately Colonel Gordon was too deeply concerned with other matters to give a more detailed account of the Strandlopers. Had he known it, he was probably the only white man from that day to this to set eyes on that strange race.

Since then word of the existence of the Strandlopers has reached civilisation only in the shape of native rumours. Whereas formerly the Strandlopers occupied the whole western shore of the Cape and South West Africa, the spread of white colonisation found them creeping doggedly into the loneliest recesses of the coast to the north. It is a tantalising glimpse that we

are given of these missing links in the world of anthropology.

The great interest surrounding the Strandlopers lies in the fact that they were relatives of the Boskop man – a type known only by their skulls, but identified definitely as very early men indeed in the history of the African continent. When the Bushmen arrived, they treated the Strandlopers as inferior beings, and often killed them at sight. Those who have seen the few remaining Bushmen in the desert areas of Southern Africa may wonder whether anything lower in the scale of humanity could have existed in the past. The Strandlopers, however, must have been inferior in that they preferred the life of the seashore and a diet mainly composed of shell-fish; whereas the Bushmen were magnificent hunters and counted it a wasted day when they had no meat.

Strandloper's caves have revealed the interesting method of burying their dead. The bodies were always placed within sound of the sea. They were painted with red ochre, and buried on their sides with the legs drawn up, just as the prehistoric man slept. Large slabs of rocks were placed on the bodies, and stone implements were left with them. The first joint of the little finger was always removed with a sharp stone during the Strandloper's lifetime, for this secured for him a happy after-life of feasting in some heavenly cave.

Reconstructions of these bones suggest that the Strandloper's were never more than five feet in height. Some authorities declare they had peppercorn hair, sparkling eyes and haggard faces; others say they had infantile features. The women decorated themselves with beads of ostrich egg-shell, while the men carried bows,

poisoned arrows, bamboo harpoons for fishing, and stone hammers.

The kitchen middens of the Strandloper's – under which hundreds of skeletons have been found – have given useful proof of the varieties of vanished wild life in different parts of South Africa. In some were discovered an extraordinary miscellany of hippo and elephant bones mixed with bush pig tusks, buck and bird bones, crab claws, tortoise carapace and the inevitable mussel shells.

Such were the Strandloper's of the past. They shared with the Bushmen the art of painting on rocks; fresh rock engravings are discovered every year. Many more relics of those far-off days must remain unsuspected in the soil of the South African coast. Possibly the key to that mysterious past will one day be recovered. I know that I should like to be present at the dramatic meeting of the men of today

and that legendary tribe of Strandlopers – those dawn men who are said to survive in the unknown Kaokoveld.

2

Of all the millions of black, brown and copper-coloured men who inhabit Africa, I do not suppose there is a more mysterious race than the Berg Damaras. It is possible to explain the presence of every other tribe in all the different territories. But the Berg Damaras, living in the almost inaccessible mountain strongholds of South West Africa, have baffled the attempts of all the scientists who have tried to discover their origin.

It was in Swakopmund – the old German seaport of the colony, and now a mere seaside resort – that a Berg Damara was pointed out to me for the first time. A small man with the features of a negro, he was; with the typical black skin and

sunken nostrils. Now the natives of Southern Africa are not negroes; they differ in appearance from the Berg Damaras as the Chinese differ from, say, the Australian aboriginals.

The Berg Damaras, a tribe of about twenty thousand form a racial island in a sea of other distinct types. They have lost almost every trace of their past. Their language is the queer speech of the Nama Hottentots, who enslaved them for centuries. They are so humble that they have no name for themselves. The strong Herero tribe call them Ovazorotua – the “black foreigners.” And indeed the Berg Damaras are among the blackest people in Africa.

The Berg Damaras must have been the last distinct race in Africa to be discovered. It is only a hundred and forty years ago that Pieter Brand, the Dutch explorer, found the tribe in the Auas Mountains and brought the news of them to civilisation. For long

years after that date the mild Berg Damaras lived their wretched lives of persecution, robbed or shot at sight by the warlike Hereros. The introduction of fire-arms in South West Africa made their plight worse, and they fled further into the mountain fastness's. How far they went no white man knows to this day, for there are large unexplored areas in South West Africa.

A wonderful study for the scientist they remain. Untouched by progress, they are at least no longer hunted and massacred. They were freed from slavery by the German Government after the defeat of the Hereros in 1907, and granted a reserve of their own as a reward for their loyalty. Wanderers from the tribe are now found everywhere in South West Africa as servants and farm labourers.

It may seem strange that no dim memory of their original language remains, but this

is a fact. The Berg Damaras are clear on one point – that their ancestors were already at home in the land when all the other tribes arrived. They have one legend only – that in ancient times they lived by a river which flowed all the year round. Not one of the sandy occasional rivers of South West Africa answers to this description. Along the Orange River there is a tradition of a vanished people, the Kattea, and some believe that these were the Berg Damaras before they went north. But even the great Orange River often dries up to a mere trickle.

The Berg Damaras are bow and arrow men – as primitive in many ways as the Bushmen. Up in the distant Waterberg, the Brandberg and the Erongo Mountains you may see them catching wild game in pitfalls, as their ancestors did centuries ago. Rock shelters are their homes. They are still miserably poor, for while other tribes own fat cattle, the Berg Damaras

have only a few goats. Locusts are caught, roasted and crushed for preserving. Bulbs and berries, wild honey and caterpillars practically complete their diet. "Dagga" smoking – the drug of many an African tribe – has played havoc with the physique of some of them. Yet the Berg Damaras are still the finest mountain climbers in Africa. For generations they have had to climb to save their lives – they have inherited hard feet and great skill in reaching heights. Possibly it is jealousy which moves other tribes to say that the Berg Damaras are not men but baboons.

They are thin, these Berg Damaras. They never wash, for they believe that water on the skin is dangerous. Other tribes have a wide knowledge of herbal remedies; in some cases a skill in healing almost approaching modern medicine. The Berg Damaras treat all illness by burning – a method which, as might be expected,

produces few cures, but in which they persist year after year.

As far as is known, they have never had a chief or leader. The tribal organisation was always so weak that they never combined to attack their enemies. Even their religion is lost. They say that in the mountains of the unmapped Kaokoveld there is a large black stone, which they call their great-grandfather; and that they and every living thing came from it. That is their only spiritual belief.

It is remarkable that such a weak and primitive people should have possessed one art which the intellectually superior Hereros lacked – the art of working in iron. As slaves, the Berg Damaras made weapons for the Hereros and later repaired their guns.

Probably the Berg Damaras were the first of all that horde of dark-skinned people who swept down from the north into South

Africa. Cut off by some whim of Fate from their fellows, the Berg Damaras in South West Africa were not strong enough in numbers to resist the tribes which followed. So these negroes acquired the characteristics of several races – the hunting methods of the Bushman, the language of the Hottentot, some of the customs of the Herero.

For them at least the coming of the white man was a blessing; for it freed them from the slavery and persecution that had been their lot since the Dark Ages.

3

In the very early days of the Dutch East India Company's settlement in the Cape there arose a race of half-caste people who clung together, remained intact, and who form a queer little "republic" at the present time.

Marriages between officials of the Company and Hottentot women were not frowned upon three centuries ago. Pieter van Meerhof, a noted explorer of his day, received both promotion and presents when he married the famous Eva, a Hottentot woman who had been brought up in the house of van Riebeeck, the first Dutch Governor. Sailors visited the slave lodges. And so these mixed people grew up, welcoming white blood and shunning those darker in colour than themselves.

In the course of time, however, they found the white farmers did not care to have them as neighbours. The half-castes drifted northwards into the lesser-known parts of the Cape – pioneers and hunters in a land where men lived dangerously. They were Christians, and liked to have missionaries living among them. But they were fighting men, too, and often enough they had to defend themselves against the marauding bands of Hottentots who left their

strongholds on the Orange River islands to raid the farms.

At the end of the eighteenth century the half-castes had occupied a frontage of six hundred miles along the Orange River—about five thousand souls owning seven hundred muskets and much cattle. Restless spirits, they were, always seeking new country. Early last century they drew up their code of laws and organised themselves, like a tribe out of the Bible, on the communal basis which exists to this day. I will quote only the first of their laws: “That wilful murder be in every case punished by the death of the murderer. That execution be always public, either by hanging or shooting.”

The half-castes were the first real settlers in that great country known as South West Africa — formerly a German colony. In 1870 their leader, always styled Captain, Hermanus van Wyk, approached the

famous Herero Chief Kamaharero at Okahandja and obtained the finest land for cattle-raising in the whole territory. It is not clear what title or option of purchase was granted to them; this is a question which statesmen have puzzled over for decades, and which has engaged the attention of the League of Nations. But the territory called Rehoboth has been theirs for sixty years, and they have clung to it tenaciously in the face of many bitter attacks. They opened up water by blasting, made gardens, built houses and finally erected a tiny “Parliament House” where their Raad (Council) meets every year.

The half-caste Rehoboths, indeed, set up nothing less than a civilised republic in a savage land. Their first enemies were the surrounding tribes, which coveted their cattle; again and again the Rehoboths had to beat off warlike natives who later almost defeated the German forces. (The German campaign lasted six years and cost thirty

million pounds.) But the Rehoboths survived. Failing to obtain protection from the British Government, they made a treaty with the Germans which recognised the independence of the Rehoboths within their own borders. This was no mean achievement when the arrogance of the German Colonial Governors of those days is taken into account.

To run through the records of the Rehoboths, as I have done, is to see again those proud German names of men who were a power in the land – men like von Lindequist, Seitz, Leutwein and Francke. Names like Maharero, Kamaherero, Jonker Afrikaner, Swartbooï and Witbooï. Men who have gone.

The Rehoboths were the allies of the Germans in those old and fierce campaigns against the Hottentots and the Hereros. In return for their loyalty, they were always treated as a people superior to the natives.

Governor Leutwein wrote: “They have rendered us very valuable services both in peace and in war. We must therefore attach them to us more and more and, in terms of their own expressed wishes, we should place them as near as possible to the whites.”

Some of the Rehoboths I saw while travelling through their “republic” a few years ago closely resembled white men in appearance. Outside the territory they might have passed as white men. Others were darker skinned and retained the Hottentot features. The strangest thing, in the eyes of the visitor, is the clothing worn by the women. They copied the dress of the first German missionary women in the territory – enormous Victorian skirts, tight waists and “leg-o’-mutton” sleeves. These fashions have never changed. I believe there is a clothing factory in London which caters for these and other conservative folk in Africa – the land of lost fashions.

After a period of peace the Great War once again brought a crisis in the affairs of the Rehoboths. When South African troops advanced into the territory the German authorities called up the Rehoboth Militia for service behind the lines. At first the Rehoboths served willingly under the German colours; but when military uniforms were issued to them there were signs of revolt. They pointed out that they had come originally from the Cape, and they did not wish to fight the South Africans.

A dramatic incident at this time was the secret journey by Captain Cornelius van Wyk, the Rehoboth leader, through the German lines. General Botha had landed with an expeditionary force at Swakopmund, and there van Wyk arrived safely. He informed General Botha that the Rehoboths had been forced to serve with the Germans, and asked for favourable treatment when the country had been

conquered. General Botha then gave a verbal promise that all the rights the Rehoboths had enjoyed before 1914 should be maintained; and though no record of the famous Boer commander's words was made, the promise has been honoured in the years that followed.

Meanwhile the South African troops were penetrating farther and farther into the country, and the Rehoboths rose in open revolt. This infuriated the Germans. They sent a strong force into the Rehoboth territory and cornered the rebels. There is no doubt the Rehoboths would have perished almost to a man but for the timely arrival of General Mackenzie and his column of South Africans.

The strong sense of independence which flourishes among the Rehoboth people emerged again after the War, when they threatened rebellion against the new rulers of the land as a result of some small

grievance. Twenty years ago the Germans would have wiped them out mercilessly for such talk. The South African authorities settled the whole affair without the loss of a single life by sending a few military aeroplanes to fly over the territory.

So the Rehoboths are living quiet lives again, making their simple laws and entering them, in the Afrikaans language, in school exercise books! There are about five thousand of them in the little “republic.” They retain their wanderlust and set out on hunting expeditions into far corners of South West Africa, returning with wagons loaded with leopard skins and karosses.

I think the Rehoboths have proved an exception to the rule that the children of mixed marriages inherit the worst characteristics of both races. No one could have imagined the civilised, self-governing community in the heart of

South West Africa which arose out of the water-front love affairs of sailors and Hottentot girls in the days when Cape Town was the “Tavern of the Seas.”

CHAPTER 11

GIANTS OF THE JUNGLE

STRANGE creatures still remain to be found in Africa. How can we scoff at legends of mystery animals with the evidence before us of spoors, photographs, the reports of trustworthy hunters – yes, and even living specimens of hitherto unknown animals?

Remember please that the okapi was nothing more than a rumour until Sir Harry Johnston discovered it in 1900. An okapi is now flourishing on bananas and vegetables in the Antwerp Zoo. The bongo, regarded as a myth for years, was recently captured in North Kenya by Colonel Percy Smith. This rare antelope, with its long horns and brilliant chestnut body with white stripes, was shipped alive to London. Its home is in the Ituri forests, where dwell a race of pygmies who were themselves unknown for years after the Belgian colonisation of the Congo.

Then there is the quagga, a charming animal resembling the okapi in some ways and the zebra in others. Naturalists believed that the last quagga was shot half a century ago. The other day news came that a small herd has been definitely identified in a remote corner of South West Africa.

The Union Government is taking steps to protect the quaggas from those ruthless modern hunters who set out in motor-cars to kill every wild animal which has a market value. Dead or alive, a quagga would be worth a large sum – thousands of pounds alive, I should say – to any large zoo or museum. In the whole of South Africa, where thousands of quaggas roamed within living memory, there is now only one museum specimen. Boer hunters shot them mercilessly for their hides, and by 1870 there was hardly a quagga to be seen on the vast plains south of the Vaal River.

“Qua-ha-ha!” That is the cry of the quagga and the reason for the strange name. It most closely resembles the mountain zebra, but it is akin to the horse and the ass, too. The specimen in the Cape Town museum is a light-brown foal; but full-grown quaggas usually have reddish brown heads and necks, with the under-body, legs and tail nearly white. High crests and standing manes give the quagga a handsome appearance.

The re-discovery of the quagga was made by a mine manager with long experience of the wild life of Africa. He realised when he first sighted the quagga that when he reported his find the naturalists would say that he had confused the quagga with Burchell's zebra, with which it is often confused. So he remained silent until he could arrange a trip to the same spot with several friends. It was in a lonely, mountainous area of the Namib Desert,

more than sixty miles from the railway line, and far from any farm.

On the second occasion he saw a herd of fourteen quagga at close range, and pointed out their distinguishing marks to his friends. The quagga were lighter in colour than zebras; and most important of all, they were striped only to the shoulders. Zebras are striped all over; and a herd of zebras in the vicinity made comparison easy and certain. The quaggas, it was noted, grazed apart from the zebras.

Many stories of the quagga having been seen in distant and unsettled parts of Southern Africa reach the museum authorities. Investigation usually proves that they are mountain zebras. The mine manager, however, could hardly have been mistaken; he anticipated criticism and made a careful study of the herd.

A living quagga was presented to the London Zoo by Sir George Grey in 1858.

Quaggas were easily tamed, and made delightful and useful pets. They could be interbred with the horse; indeed two beautiful horse-quaggas were often seen drawing a phaeton in Hyde Park in 1826 – a queer sight which was recorded in the newspapers of the day. Long before that a tame quagga was kept at Windsor.

Tanned quagga skins, soft as silk, may still be seen with the hair scraped off in a few South African farmhouses. The flesh is delicious. On the old Market Square at Bloemfontein the wagons of the hunters used to stand loaded with quagga biltong, which was bartered for ammunition and provisions.

Some of Africa's lost animals are known only by their bones. It was only in 1932 that the first South African variety of kangaroo was identified. Dr. W. Beetz, a geologist, at work on the famous diamond

terrace at Kleinsee, Namaqualand, made the discovery of the fragments.

The importance of these remains of a creature no larger than a rat lies in the fact that marsupials are found living today only in Australia and South America – countries so far apart that naturalists cannot explain the migration. But with this new knowledge the theory that there was once a land-bridge between the continents – “Lemuria” some call it – is greatly strengthened. It is not too much to hope that a living specimen of the South African kangaroo may still be found in Namaqualand; for corners of this great territory of drought and diamonds are seldom visited by white men, and then only by prospectors. An animal the size of a rat, with long incisor teeth and a pouch, might easily escape the observation of such casual travellers.

Mr. F. Grobler, a well-known South African hunter; brought such a queer tale to Cape Town in July 1932, that he would probably never have told it without a photograph to support him. This was the story of the weird monster known among the natives of the Dilolo swamps in Angola as *chepekwe*.

“I think it is a member of the dinosaur family,” Mr. Grobler told me. “Its weight would be about four tons, and it attacks rhino, hippo and elephants. Hunters have heard the *chepekwe* devouring a dead rhino – crunching the bones and tearing out huge lumps of meat. It has the head and tail of a lizard. A German scientist has photographed it. I went to the swamps in search of it; but the natives told me it was extremely rare, and I could not locate the monster. Nevertheless I am convinced the *chepekwe* does exist. Here is the photograph.”

It was not a clear picture – photography in the primeval jungles of Africa is always difficult – but it revealed something new to science. Certainly it was not a crocodile. The Cape Argus published the photograph, and most of the experts who joined in the subsequent controversy admitted that a few relics of prehistoric times might still linger in the remote swamps of the tropics.

That Africa was indeed a playground for giants of the animal world has been proved up to the hilt. A British Museum expedition in Tanganyika excavated a dinosaur graveyard a few years ago. Many of the giant skeletons were perfectly preserved, and the bones were so numerous that the scientists were able to send specimens to a number of museums. More than one type was found; there were some that must have walked on all fours and others that held their enormous bodies erect, supported by the tail. It is possible, indeed, that some of these fossils were

once “flying lizards.” Once again Africa’s reputation as the land of surprises was demonstrated.

The dwarf elephants of the Congo were regarded as a myth until an expedition stumbled across one – a tiny female, not five feet high, but fully grown, tusks weighing two pounds.

Officers of the Victoria Nyanza steamers have described a long-necked prehistoric beast seen in the lake. The Barotses of the Zambezi declare they have encountered a monster which they call the “Great One”; and some white hunters who went in search of it returned with a report of a footprint seen in wet mud – a footprint five feet long. We know the brontosaurus lived in swamps; and there are still swamps along the lonely reaches of the Zambezi which no white explorer has ever penetrated.

A hunting leopard of a new species was captured in Rhodesia only a few years ago. Possibly a “Nandi bear” will be trapped or shot one of these days. Selous, perhaps the greatest of all African hunters, believed in this ferocious beast. Reports of its crimes crop up persistently in several East African territories. Thus, when a native child is missing, the “Nandi bear” is blamed. When a native strolling in the forest suddenly finds that his scalp has been taken off by an animal in a tree, he runs back to the village shouting curses on the “Nandi bear.” All agree that the mysterious animal can climb trees. As a rule the “Nandi bear” leaves human beings alone, feeding voraciously on such pigs, goats or antelopes as it encounters. It comes out only at night.

While most of the evidence regarding the “Nandi bear” comes from native sources, there are a few more reliable descriptions. Major Braithwaite and Mr. Kenneth

Archer, well-known British hunters, saw a mysterious creature shambling away from them like a bear – a creature with dark brown hair. And Mr. R. Hauser of Uganda once set poison for hyenas near Lake Alberta, and found an animal three times the size of the ordinary spotted hyena lying dead near the trap. The head resembled a bear and the skin was yellow brown. An old witch-doctor declared it was not a hyena, though he did not know the name of it. Mr. Hauser took a photograph of the strange beast; but he lost both his camera and his elephant gun while crossing a river shortly afterwards. Fame still awaits the first man to bring in a “Nandi bear,” alive or dead.

Africa is saying farewell to giant animals which once crashed through the forests in enormous herds. The white rhinoceros is passing. Soon, when old hunters meet at the “Place of the Winds,” they will speak

of this great beast as a friend who has gone for ever “into the blue.”

Only two fast diminishing herds of these grotesque creatures of the dawn world now remain – one in the Sudan, the other in Zululand. Both are protected by the Governments of those territories. But in the valley of the Umfolosi, in Zululand, some of the white rhinos – there were not more than a score all told – have died of starvation, following on a long drought.

In daylight the white rhino is almost as dark as the common black rhinoceros. You have to see a family of white rhino – bull, cow and one or two calves – at night to realise why they are called white. The skin has some peculiar quality which gives it a white appearance under the South African moon. A weird sight – this glimpse of the rarest land mammal in the world feeding on grass in the tropical bush country.

White rhinos are seldom seen while the sun is up – that is why so few photographs of them have ever been taken. They rest and sleep in the impenetrable bush all day, and go trotting off to water at sundown. It is said that white rhino are never found more than forty miles from a river.

Unmolested, the white rhino is a mild fellow. He lives in a dim world, with his clear sight limited to about twenty-five yards. Nature compensates him with almost incredible powers of smell. The hunter who approaches down wind is detected half a mile away. His hearing is acute, too, as baffled cinema men have discovered; the whirring of a camera is enough to send the white rhino galloping off beyond range.

No zoo in the world possesses a white rhino. In the past a few young ones have been captured, but they were too sensitive to live long in captivity. It would be

impossible to capture a fully grown white rhino alive. When attacked by human beings they are infuriated to madness, and charge the first large object in sight. They have been known to dash into trees, burying their great horns in the wood.

The presence of a white rhino is often revealed by tick birds and egrets, which hover over the broad back or rest on it. The tick birds are the white rhino's danger signal – they set up a shrill chatter of alarm when human beings, or lions, are near. It is not known whether lions attack the white rhino; but the fact that the rhino walks with its head down and long horn thrust forward suggests an attitude of defence. The throat is a vulnerable spot.

Such are the doomed, mysterious survivors of this once great species. The largest of them are about fourteen feet long, twelve feet in circumference, and more than six feet in height. They breed slowly – not

more than once in four years. The world will not see their like again.

2

Elephants take us back to the dawn of the world. Other creatures of the darkness of prehistoric times are now known only by their bones. The elephant crashes trumpeting into our day as a surviving mammoth, the real king of all the animals, wise and brave and strong.

There are still wild elephants close to the southern tip of Africa – the famous dwarf elephants of the Addo Bush and the giants of the Knysna forests, only three hundred miles from Cape Town, the last herd of great tuskers south of the Zambezi.

Few people, even in South Africa, know the Knysna herd. You may spend all your life in the town of Knysna with never a glimpse of them. Yet they are there, in the cool green shelter of the remote forest;

descendants of the legions that made their home among the tall stinkwood trees when the world was young. Out of all those untold thousands only eleven, perhaps thirteen elephants remain. Some of this last herd, no doubt, saw the first white men arrive with their muzzle-loaders. Long before that they escaped the poisoned arrows and pits of Bushman hunters. How long will they resist the advance of the woodcutters and the gradual destruction of their forest stronghold?

In the forest, seven miles from Knysna, I met a timber foreman – one of the handful of men who know the elephants. “They were rooting up the ferns in a kloof when I last saw them,” he said. “Talking to each other with voices like turkey-cocks, rolling in the mud-holes, tobogganning down the muddy slopes with their feet together like great dogs. I was not more than three hundred yards away, but they could not get my scent – the wind was in my direction.

For ten minutes I watched them at play; then I shouted. They all went swaying off blindly into the undergrowth, gaining speed like battering rams, the old ones urging the calves along, until they disappeared, still trumpeting and breaking down the young trees in their path.”

On rainy days, sometimes, the herd leaves the forest to rove the open veld. Elephants detest heat, and the blind flies that worry them in the open on hot days. Also, they seem to know that they are less likely to encounter human beings in wet weather.

The foreman once found an elephant skeleton, with one tusk in the ground, broken, and the other missing – stolen by some poacher. Years ago there was a daring band of Knysna woodcutters who used to prey on the elephant herds. The ivory was smuggled away under loads of timber in ox-wagons fitted with false bottoms. Elephant hunting was still

permitted in the Northern Transvaal in those days; and there the poachers sold their tusks.

Major Pretorius, the well-known South African hunter, was recently allowed to shoot two of the Knysna herd for museum specimens. He found the herd in a patch of forest, sent beaters and dogs to a rise in the ground above the elephants, and waited with his huge express elephant gun. The dogs drove the maddened herd into the open, and Major Pretorius selected a magnificent old bull. The eighth shot brought it down. You can see this bull in the Cape Town Museum – a record specimen measuring twenty-two feet three inches long and twelve feet six inches high. Six more shots killed a smaller bull.

In Knysna men still talk of the Duke of Edinburgh’s hunt in 1864. Old engravings in many homes illustrate that famous scene – the Duke, firing at an enormous tusker at



Tusks brought into Stanleyville for sale.

a range of eighteen yards while his frenzied horse bolts. The Duke took two fine heads and skins back to England with him.

A fully grown African elephant is twice the size of the Asiatic species; and there is some foundation for the statement of the Knysna people that their elephants are the largest in the world.

So much mystery still surrounds the life story and habits of the elephant that it is not remarkable that the Knysna herd provides riddles for the people of the forests. There is a Government station in the forest at Deepwalls. Year after year, sometimes on the same night each year, the whole herd crosses the road at the thirteenth milestone near Deepwalls. They remain in a lonely, burnt-out clearing for two days; then they return to their favourite abode at a place called Oubrand. No one can say what strange instinct

moves them to make this regular pilgrimage.

Even this small herd does tremendous damage in the plantations. They pull up the young trees in search of tasty roots, tear off branches, chew off leaves at the top, and sometimes make a combined attack on larger trees which one elephant cannot break down alone. A fire-belt of young blackwood trees valued at £200 was recently destroyed in this way.

They seem to hate any man-made thing. They hurl wagons off the road, trample down loose stone beacons placed by surveyors, and carry off farm gates.

It is thirty years since the Knysna herd killed a man. He had foolishly pitched his camp on the elephant trail; and while he slept that night his dog attacked an elephant. Furiously the elephant charged the dog and crushed the sleeping man.

The woodcutters fear the elephants. When they are felling timber near Oubrand they always lash a rope ladder to a huge tree. Only a year ago the value of this precaution was proved; for a party of woodcutters were “treed” for two days. Of course there are many false alarms, and a famous practical joke is played by the woodcutters. One of the party creeps away from the camp at night, rolls a log down towards his companions, and blows into a paraffin tin. This reproduces exactly the terrifying noise of a charging elephant: The camp clears out, and the humourist is able to jeer at the men in the tree-tops.

It is said that the Knysna elephants, at intervals of many years, go pounding across country for a hundred miles to visit their small cousins in the Addo Bush. There are between thirty and forty in the Addo herd. Scientists believe that they were once giants, like the Knysna elephants, and that in the course of

thousands of years they have become dwarfs to fit in with the low scrub bush which hides them. Most of them have lost their tusks during this process. At the beginning of the century the Addo herd was hundreds strong, and devastated many a farm. It was found impossible to keep the elephants within their reserve, forty miles long and twenty miles wide, and so the thunder of guns was heard in the bush and the elephants were thinned out. These attacks made the survivors more alert and irritable, certainly more dangerous than ever before. He is a bold man who goes hunting in the fastness's of this dying race.

One of the most daring Addo hunters was a strange character named Crick – a man who lived in the bush for weeks on end for the sheer love of being alone in the wild. Crick once accompanied a farmer named Attrell on an attempt to capture a calf elephant. Attrell was caught by a cow elephant and crushed to death before Crick could get in

the deadly brain shot. Crick never recovered from this experience. He disappeared into the bush and was found dead weeks afterwards, with a revolver beneath his body – one chamber empty.

Chains of fire have been used in recent years to prevent the Addo elephants from wandering out of their reserve. In hot, dry weather they become restless; nothing but fire will keep them away from the neighbouring farms. Occasionally they succeed in breaking through the flaming bush, and then they run amok on cultivated land, causing enormous damage. One cow elephant crossed the boundary early this year, wrecked the fence round a homestead and stamped the garden flat. Within an hour the elephant created a scene reminiscent of a cyclone.

Major Pretorius, the hunter mentioned earlier in this chapter, shot eighty of the Addo elephants just after the Great War at

the request of the authorities. The order was given reluctantly, for the value of this last herd of dwarf elephants as a sight for tourists was fully realised. Farming near the reserve, however, had become almost impossible owing to the frequent raids of the herd. Dams had been ruined, fences uprooted, irrigation canals destroyed. In the circumstances, the plan of thinning out the herd was justified. It was a nerve-racking task, as one incident alone will prove.

Major Pretorius was accompanied on the hunt by a Brigadier-General Ravenshaw, a distinguished officer of whose courage there could be no doubt. The General set out by himself one day in pursuit of a leopard, and the chase led him deep into the wilderness of the Addo Bush. Suddenly he found himself in the midst of the elephants.

His beaters fled. General Ravenshaw was found dead – untouched. Heart-failure had caused his tragic end; for there is no more

terrifying experience in the world than to be alone, without an elephant gun, among an infuriated herd.

Mr. F. W. Fitzsimons, the South African naturalist, who has studied these elephants for many years, believes that the thirty or forty survivors will perish unless they are provided with a proper water supply. It is when the wells of the reserve dry up that they go crashing over the farms to slake their great thirst.

Every farmer in the territory has stories to tell of chance encounters with the Addo elephants. One farmer, taking a load of forage to the nearest town by wagon at night, heard the elephants trumpeting along the road. They smelt the forage and began cautiously to approach the wagon. But the farmer was a man of resource. He seized a bundle of hay, set fire to it and dropped it on the road. The elephants stood back until the light they feared had died away. By

firing more and more hay, the farmer reached safety – but he had little forage to sell when he arrived.

Another farmer named Pienaar was not so fortunate. He was out driving cattle when a lone bull elephant – one of the “rogues” of the herd – charged and killed him. If there were no “rogues” there would be little danger in the Addo Bush. Often a rogue “will charge immediately it gets wind of a human being. The experienced hunter waits until this terrifying mass of deadly elephant comes thundering to within twenty or thirty yards before he fires. He has one shot only, and only a miracle will save him if he misses then.

It is said that the Addo elephants have a system of signals which they use when they are being hunted. Often, a herd of elephants makes more noise than an express train passing through a station. Their trumpeting could be heard easily

above the roar of a liner’s siren. But approach the Addo elephants when they are feeding, let the sentinel get wind of you – and lo! a shrill call goes out which puts every elephant on guard. They may stampede with the noise of an earthquake; or they may vanish silently into the bush with only a bough cracking here and there to show which way they have gone.

Stray elephants from Portuguese East Africa are seen occasionally in the Northern Transvaal; but the elephants of Knysna and Addo are the very last herds in South Africa. It is remarkable that even these small herds survive, for organised elephant hunting such as F. C. Selous knew was at an end in South Africa nearly half a century ago.

Before very long we may have to write the drama of the last great tusker’s death in the South African forests.

In the Kaffrarian Museum at King William's Town there stands a hippopotamus which gave South Africa thrill after thrill for more than two years. For this enormous stuffed hide was once Huberta the Hippo – the famous roving hippo which was looked upon by white South Africans as a friend, and by natives as the reincarnation of a great chief.

Flags were flown at half-mast in Durban on the tragic day when the “assassination” of Huberta became known. Four farmers convicted of the deed were each fined £25 or three months' hard labour. A wave of protest swept through the country, and a museum director wrote: “I have entirely despaired of human nature. There are some people who cannot see an interesting specimen without itching to take a pot shot at it.”

How did Huberta the Hippo capture the affection of the whole of South Africa? It is a fascinating story. To realise the sensation caused everywhere by the appearance of Huberta, it must be understood that South Africa – apart from a few game reserves – is no longer a wonderland of big game. Thousands of people living in the cities have never seen the wild game of the country except in captivity. So that when a full-grown hippopotamus strolled into the village of New Guelderland, fifty miles from Durban, the event received large headlines in all the newspapers.

Indians and natives working in the fields of sugar-cane were the first to raise the alarm. They heard a snorting and a bellowing, and they ran for safety. The hippo remained until hundreds of people were staring wide-eyed with astonishment; then retreated into the thicket.

Undoubtedly this adventurous hippo had wandered from the Umfolosi sanctuary, near Lake St. Lucia, Zululand – the last-known breeding-place of the hippo within the borders of the Union. At first she was named “Billy” by the special correspondents who rushed to the spot; but it was as Hubert the Hippo that she became a national character. It was not until after her death that the mistake about her sex was discovered, and she was renamed Huberta.

From the day of her first appearance until her death Huberta was a marked hippo. After she had startled the plantation workers at Guelderland she very quickly achieved notoriety. An enterprising Press photographer went out among the sugar-cane. But when he levelled his camera Huberta charged him.

Curious crowds flocked to see her. As they grew bigger they annoyed Huberta more and more and finally she moved off. From

that moment began her journeying’s which were to last two years and make her the most famous hippo that ever lived.

She moved first in the direction of Durban. As she approached the city she passed through areas which grew more and more thickly populated with every mile. Naturally the sensation she caused was enormous.

Yet she showed extraordinary cunning, for no one in the district ever caught more than a glimpse of her huge body. She travelled chiefly by night and spent the day wallowing submerged in the little rivers of the country-side. But farmers used to hear snortings at night and sometimes they found fences which looked as though a tank had charged them. Sometimes, too, they saw her and then the newspapers used to publish bulletins describing her latest movements.

As she approached Durban, which is one of the largest cities in South Africa, the excitement grew. "Hubert On His Way," stated the headlines (they thought she was a bull then) and people waited eagerly to see where she would make her next appearance. Of course, had it been necessary, an organised hunt could have put an end to her career then and there. But by this time Huberta was a public character. She had roused the amusement, even the affection of the entire population. It had been proved that she was quite harmless. Occasionally she charged people who were too inquisitive. She had done a little damage to the farms across which she made her way. But nobody really minded this. It is no exaggeration to say that all South Africa was chuckling over the newspaper descriptions of her adventures.

Her greatest escapade followed. She called at an hotel just outside Durban one night, appeared suddenly and gave some of the

habitués a severe nervous shock. After this, however, she decided that she was coming too closely into contact with civilisation. She made a wide detour and was not heard of again until she reached the coast, twenty miles south of Durban. Journeying on, she came to the mouth of the Umzimvubu River, near Port St. John. There she settled down for a time and lived happily in the river. But again her fatal curiosity got the better of her, and one night she visited the village of Port St. John. A town councillor, so it is said, was crossing the square to a meeting. He flashed his electric torch in front of him and saw the yawning mouth of a hippo. He did not attend the meeting! Huberta sat down in the square and soon the entire population of the village turned out to see her. It was the most exciting thing that ever happened in Port St. John, or is ever likely to happen there. Huberta bore the shouting of men and women and the barking of dogs for half an hour. Then she

left Port St. John, never to return. Her wanderings had begun again.

Huberta's odyssey now became a less pleasant one. The Bloemfontein Zoo had sent a party out to capture her alive.

They were hard upon her trail. But Huberta by this time had lived upon the fringes of civilisation for nearly two years. She had developed amazing cunning. She passed through areas inhabited by natives and they saw not the least sign of her. Often she travelled extremely fast. She would be reported at one point and be fully thirty miles away next morning. She was still travelling south. She had crossed the border and entered the Cape Province, skirted East London and then plunged into Keiskama River. This was the perfect home for the hippo, though no hippo had lived there for more than fifty years. However, it looked as though Huberta

were to settle there, and while she did her pursuers had little hope of catching her.

Then one day a farmer reported to the magistrate at Peddle near King William's Town that he had seen a dead hippo in the river. They went to the spot and with eighteen oxen and chains hauled out the body. It was Huberta with bullet holes above her eyes. She was a full-grown cow hippo 9 feet 2 inches in length and with a girth of 8 feet 1 inch. She must have weighed nearly four tons.

Every paper in South Africa published an obituary. Museums quarrelled for the right to preserve her hide. There was a popular outcry against the unknown marksmen who had shot her. Eventually four men made voluntary confessions. They were charged under the game laws and fined £25 each.

Huberta will always be remembered with affection in South Africa. To the natives

the stuffed carcase will remain an object of awe for generations. While she lived they quickly surrounded her with legends. To many of them she was the reincarnation of one of the great chiefs of the past who had come back to earth to lead the Bantu nation to the greatness that once was theirs. So strong was this feeling that the expedition from Bloemfontein which set out to capture the hippo was handicapped because its Basuto boys became infected with the local superstition and believed there was a spirit in Huberta and that they dared not lay hands upon her.

In the South African Parliament a member asked the Minister of justice what steps were being taken to bring the culprits who had killed the hippo to book. Everyone, he said, had been distressed to hear of the death of this famous National character (laughter). The Minister solemnly replied that he had ordered the police to investigate.

No hippo ever had as much publicity as Huberta. She might have had a more honoured death but perhaps it was as well she died. For she lived as hippos were never meant to live, a lonely beast wandering southward searching for the mate she would never find. Had she lived she must inevitably have been captured for a zoo. That was a fate her free and roving nature could never have endured.

CHAPTER 12

SECRETS OF TABLE BAY

MANY grim secrets of the sea lie buried in the sands of Table Bay. Woodstock beach, a white stretch of sand which is one of Cape Town's playgrounds today, has seen more shipwrecks and sudden death, probably, than any other beach in the world.

There are still a few stark, rusty iron fragments of lost ships jutting above the waters of Table Bay to remind the summer crowds of old disasters. One broken hull, once the steamer *City of Lincoln*, rests so close to the shore that you could wade out to her.

She was lying in Table Bay in August, 1902, and with both her anchors out and all her cable, while the engineers worked feverishly to repair a breakdown. A gale from the north-west brought heavy rain-squalls, and in the night the *City of Lincoln*

dragged her anchors and drove broadside on to the breakers on Woodstock beach. All hands reached the shore safely. A lucky escape indeed; for it is estimated that more than four thousand lives have been lost in Table Bay shipwrecks.

The *America*, a steamer which caught fire in 1900 and was scuttled in shallow water, still shows her clipper bows above the water off the beach. Divers brought up hundreds of bottles of beer and stout from her holds. For years she made a useful mark during yacht races. Sea birds found a sanctuary on her fo'c'stle head. Swimmers from Woodstock beach rest on her old iron deck.

Other wrecks were visible, but in 1909 the authorities blew them up to clear the bay for the historical pageant held shortly afterwards.

Before the army of convicts built the Breakwater, unexpected gales made Table



The author on board his yacht in Table Bay

Bay a death-trap during the winter months. On several occasions practically every vessel in the open roadstead was hurled on to the beach. In the year 1722, when the Cape had become well-established as the half-way house to India, there were seven Dutch East Indiamen and three English ships at anchor in the bay. A tearing north-wester drove them all ashore. Six hundred sailors perished, and Woodstock beach was strewn with cargoes valued at a quarter of a million pounds.

Here was precious flotsam indeed for beachcombers, and soon eager hordes were searching among the masses of wreckage, bales, cases, boxes and bodies for loot. Officials of the Dutch East India Company acted quickly. Gallows were set up on the beach; and men caught plundering were hanged on the spot.

Eighteen years after this great gale a remarkable salvage feat was carried out from Woodstock beach. The company's ship Visch bound for Batavia with chests of gold and silver coin for the payment of officials there, ran ashore and began to break up. The seas were sweeping over her high poop when the crew abandoned her.

Diving apparatus was so primitive in those days that once a ship sank there was little chance of bringing her treasure chests to the surface. A lifeboat was ready on the beach, however, and Governor Tulbagh called for volunteers; offering two months' pay to any man who would go out to the wreck. The boat was manned and made four trips through the thundering surf, thus salving the entire treasure.

The most famous Table Bay rescue, not of money but of human beings, occurred in

1773, when the heroic farmer, Woltemade, rode out again and again on horseback to the doomed ship *De Jonge Thomas* and saved many lives.

Still greater disasters, however, were to follow. The gale of 1865 was the most destructive in the history of Table Bay. Though there have been many shipwrecks since then, nothing on that gigantic scale can possibly happen again. It was reminiscent of such old catastrophes as the loss of the Spanish Armada rather than a story of modern times.

Thirty ships lay stranded and shattered along Woodstock beach on the ghastly morning of May 18th, 1865 – ships of every size and type, owned by England, Holland, Germany and Finland. One steamer there was, and barques, schooners, brigs and brigantines. Another steamer, the *Athens*, struggled out of the anchorage when her cables parted, but

was driven on to the rocks at Mouille Point and lost with all hands. Bonfires flamed along Woodstock beach in the darkness to guide survivors drifting on rafts to the shore. This was all the help that it was possible for the people of Cape Town to give. Enormous seas broke all along the beach, making it impossible for any lifeboat to be launched.

It was a sinister dawn, heralded by the howling wind and lash of rain-squalls that broke over Woodstock beach that morning. As far as the eye could see ships were pounding and grinding in the surf, with the green breakers making a clean breach over them. On board some of the wrecks, desperate men clung to the rigging. Many had lost masts and spars-hatches, timber and cordage were coming up in tangled masses on to the beach every minute.

The death-roll was not so large as might have been expected-between fifty and sixty lives were lost, in comparison with the heavy toll of hundreds during previous gales. But the loss of shipping was considered enormous in those days of cheap ships. The value of the wrecked ships was estimated at £120,000, while their cargoes must have been worth much more. Cape Town newspapers of the day came out with pages of advertisements offering the hulks for sale.

Protected by the Breakwater, Woodstock beach will see no more drama of this kind. It is still an interesting beach, with the busy fishermen trekking and the boat-building sheds. Some fine types of Cape fishing craft may be seen there sometimes, gleaming in new paint and ready for launching.

Once I saw a huge school of porpoises trapped within a fringe of kelp, and

hunted by fishermen with harpoons. Wounded, the porpoises dashed in mad circles, blowing red jets into the air and jumping clear of the water on to the beach. Porpoise steaks taste like pork – a delicacy among the coloured fishermen. The beach resembled a butcher's shop that day.

The beach at Rogge Bay – Skate Bay in English – has vanished. In the old days it offered the fishermen better shelter than Woodstock beach; and it was used for the landing of catches even in Van Riebeeck's time.

Between the Fish Jetty and the Central Wharf there was for many years a scene of gay colour and energy which was the very essence of old Cape Town. Fish were kept alive in tanks near the square white fish market – a sort of commercial aquarium which would attract many visitors today.

On one occasion a whale, swimming foolishly into the shallows at Rogge Bay, became stranded on the beach. Someone with a keen eye to business immediately pitched a tent over it and charged sixpence a head for admission.

In recent years I have twice seen sea elephants hauling themselves out of the sea in Rogge Bay. Shy monsters, as a rule, these specimens must have been seeking a resting place as a result of sickness. It was a queer contrast – these great creatures of the lonely Antarctic islands crawling of their own accords into civilisation.

These old beaches have swallowed up romance and tragedy with the bones of wrecks and men. Their sands, perhaps, still hide silver ducatoons, spade guineas, gold plate and jewellery. They are part of the huge graveyard of the sea, a mysterious treasure chest which no man can open wide and plunder.

Scour the water-fronts of the world, and in those riotous seafaring quarters you will see the great changes steam and modern commerce have brought. The wild harbour streets of Cape Town – like the “Barbary coast” of San Francisco, the “Boca” of Buenos Aires, and Cardiff’s “Tiger Bay” – have been transformed within living memory. They are still changing. The mariners of old who drank their “Cape smoke” thirstily would find it hard to recognise a single landmark today.

Old sunlit streets in which the crews of the East India ships staggered and fought, the taverns they knew so well, the shipyards and whaling stations, the rickety wooden jetties where the cargoes from bluff-bowed merchantmen were unloaded – all these are but a memory.

The very edge of Table Bay itself, the beaches where so many swashbuckling



Whaling station at Saldanha Bay, South Africa.

dramas were played out, have been covered and reclaimed. One may sigh for the fascinating scenes which will never return, even though the smells and the tragic wrecks of the old water-front have vanished, too.

Sometimes relics of those stirring times come up from a street trench or a demolished building to remind us of “sharp shot and cold steel”; of ships and men, long dead; of warlike days when Cape Town was an outpost open to sudden attack from the sea.

Only a few years ago the remains of a sea wall, built in the early days of the Cape settlement, came to light during excavations near Dock Road. The date of this work, at which the Dutch were of necessity so skilful, may be judged from the fact that the wall had been built without cement.

Many skulls and bones of men who had died fighting were found in the same excavation. Long, rusty knives and other crude weapons showed how they had fallen. And, as the digging went on, the walls of an old blockhouse were exposed. The site, now a great cinema, was thought to be the very beach on which Van Riebeeek’s men landed.

I once talked to the foreman of a drainage gang as his men shovelled earth from a trench in another old seafaring street in Cape Town. “We find bones – mainly bones,” he told me. “But I have seen old twisted bottles and a few coins too, and cannon balls.”

Sometimes a skeleton wearing leg-irons is found. There was a spot near the sea known as the “outside place of executions,” where, a century ago, all hangings were held in public. A sinister procession marched out there from the Castle, judges,

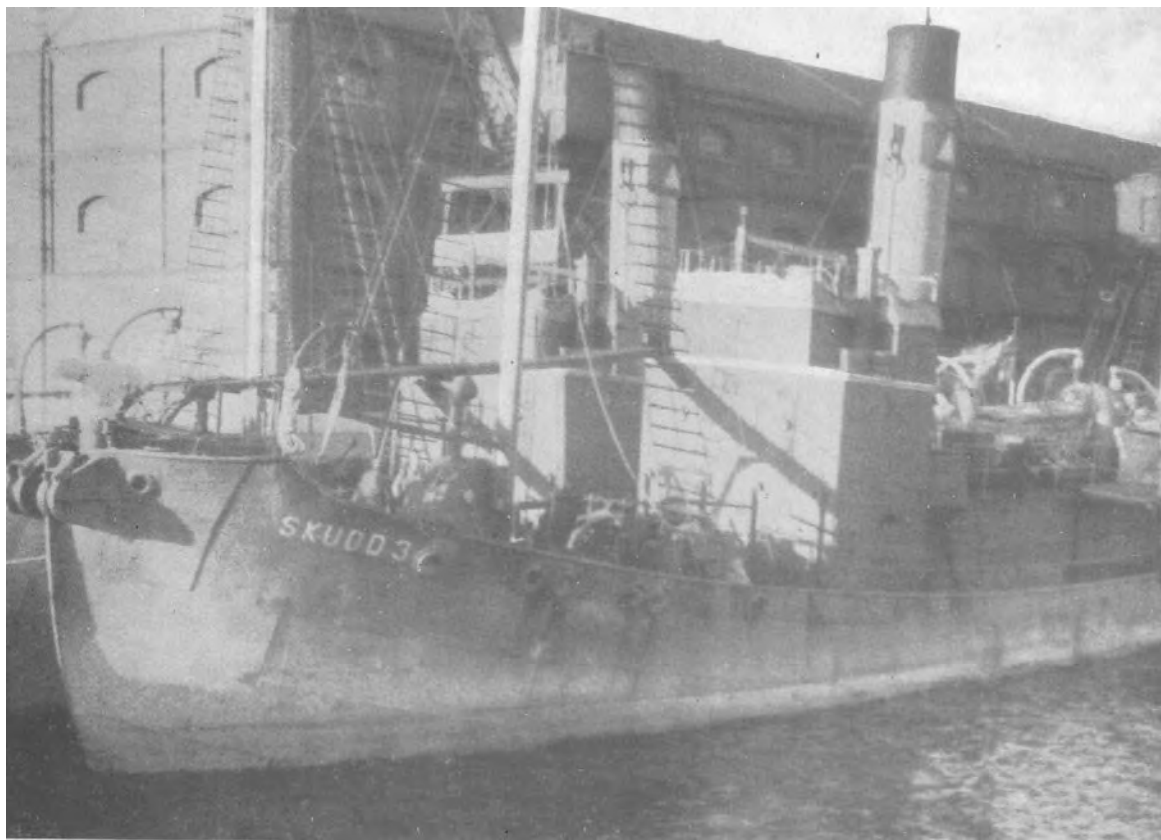
court officials, and armed guard to see the sentences carried out. You may be sure that a skeleton in leg-irons found near that place was a man who had broken the harsh code of those days – a mutinous sailor, a thief, but not necessarily a murderer.

Of hidden treasures, secret passages and hiding-places in these seafaring streets there are many legends; but if discoveries have been made, few indeed have been reported. Slave raids, the terror of the early days, explain the necessity for such hiding-places. Again and again the slaves banded themselves together, looting and killing, until they were captured and taken to Gallows Hill. Much bullion and gold plate were buried on these occasions; with the natural result that the caches were often lost and the treasure with them.

An interesting find was made in recent years during excavations beneath the

Cape Town railway station. Here a flight of sea-worn steps was uncovered; steps which may well have been built by order of Van Riebeeck himself soon after 1652, so that the pigtailed sailors could carry their water barrels and vegetables more easily to the waiting boats. The discovery was important, too, because it showed how far the modern city has encroached on the bay.

Close to these steps the navigators of the sixteenth century placed their letters, wrapped in tarpaulins, under the famous “post office stones,” in the hope that a ship homeward bound would find them. At a time when there was no white settlement whatever, it proved a fairly satisfactory system. It was in 1906, when the present railway station was built, that an important collection of “post office stones” came to light.



Norwegian whaler of the Arctic Type in Table Bay docks.

The Hottentots never tampered with the stones; but many letters were destroyed by damp. A number of these stones must still lie buried near the sandy shore of Table Bay – the eighteen stones or fragments recovered, inscribed in French, English, Dutch and Danish, cannot be all that were left when the Cape was used as a “place of refreshment” by so many ships.

One of the most remarkable finds of all was made at Blaauwberg some years ago – a place which has been so little disturbed through the centuries that many valuable relics must still lie beneath the dunes. The great find was a corroded Portuguese sword; and it was not difficult to trace it back to the slaughter of Don Francisco d’Almeida and sixty of his men by the Hottentots in 1501.

For two hundred years a line of buildings stood along the shore of Table Bay, mainly

to serve the shipping. They have all disappeared. Among them was the treadmill, which blocked the lower end of the Heerengracht – now Cape Town’s main thoroughfare. At the seafaring end of Waterkant Street there was a sailors’ boarding-house, very popular on account of its flat roof from which sea weary tars could survey the shipping in the bay. These boarding-houses, run by “crimps,” supplied liquor free to approved customers. But the men were robbed there as sailors were robbed in every seaport years ago, and soon found themselves with aching heads in the fo’c’stles of outward bound ships.

The taverns presumably sold better wine, and many flourished in the old town. Het Blaauw Anker, De Oranje Boom, Het Fransche Cazerne, De Sweedsche Vlag-romantic names for places with thatch roofs and white fronts where men

quenched thirsts that had grown during three months and more at sea.

They had to beat drums in the streets for three days before a ship left, to warn the roistering sailormen. The “Tavern of the Seas,” the half-way house to India, claimed many guests; and never were guests so reluctant to leave.

In later years a Cape coloured woman named, by her patrons, Black Sophie, ran a boarding-house which was well known to sailors all over the world. Black Sophie was not exactly an Aggy Weston, but her dances and free supplies of beer and brandy became famous. Sometimes ordinary citizens would attend; but it was a dangerous game, for any man drunk enough was shanghaied.

The scented merchandise that lay on the wooden wharves of those days brought with it the atmosphere of the East. Cargoes of teak and ebony lay there, sandalwood

and rice, tea and spices – cargoes that men had risked their lives to win. In the houses of the water-front you would have seen much blue Nankin china, silks and oriental matting and carpets.

No train whistles or motor hooters disturbed that busy water-front. Out in the bay a sailing ship might fire a salute with her brass cannon. Hansom cabs clattered over the cobble-stones. The cries of the red-fezzed Malay fishermen, the calling of the birds, creak of cargo tackle and lapping of the tide made up the melody of the evening. An old-time tune that blended perfectly with the hot golden sunlight of Old Cape Town’s seafaring streets.

Cape Town’s water-front once rang with the clamour of shipbuilders’ tools. It is true that there has been something of a

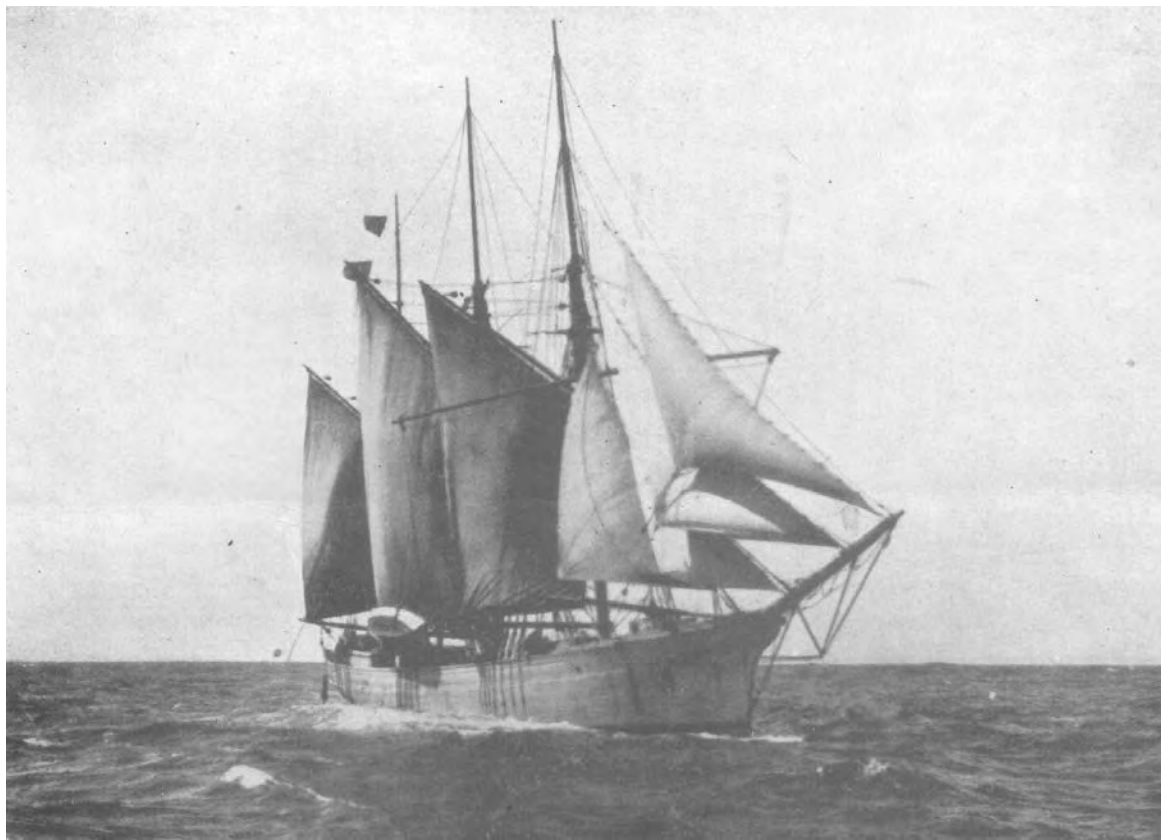
revival in this fine trade in recent years – yachts, fishing craft and coasting cutters are launched in Table Bay every year. But in the old days large brigs and schooners – the finest fleet, perhaps, south of the equator – were built in Cape Town.

There was work for sailing craft along the South African coast up to the end of last century, and after. There were wild scenes at the guano islands, when scores of ships would send their best fighting men on shore to battle for the droppings of the birds. All the grain and farming produce of the West Coast districts were brought to Cape Town by sea. Sealing schooners went north to the rocks and islets of South West Africa, and south to the Crozets. Even Tristan da Cunha provided a little trade.

So that along the shores of Table Bay, in the middle of last century, the frames of many ocean-going vessels rose from the

stocks. The work of these shipwrights would have passed muster anywhere; and the fame of the ships they built lasted long after the yards were covered with new buildings and forgotten.

African Maid, Rover, Loyd of the Isles, Walter Glendinning, Springbok – these were some of the vessels built in Cape Town. Other well-known schooners sailing out of Table Bay were the *Sea Bird, Silver Cloud, Greyhound* and *Hopefield* packet. *Sea Bird* was probably the most beautiful and best known of the fleet. Built in the ‘seventies, at Falmouth, she went sealing often among the islands with a ship’s company of seventy men in her forecabin, hold, and quarters aft. Some of these schooners were known in all the chief ports of the South Atlantic. They sailed to Rio for coffee; to the islands of the Indian Ocean for sugar; to desolate rocks on the fringe of the Antarctic for sealskins. A few sailed to the



A Cape Schooner entering Table Bay

“port of missing ships.” The most mysterious disappearance of all, I think, was that of the *Maria Frederica*.

Loaded with empty casks, the *Maria Frederica* left Table Bay for Saldanha about forty years ago. She was a well-found, seaworthy three-masted schooner with a dark past – they said that under other owners she had been in the “blackbirding” trade, a slaver to all intents and purposes. For some years before she vanished, however, the *Maria Frederica* had led a respectable life taking cargo up and down the coast. Captain Manie Fernandez, her master, was one of the most experienced seamen in these waters at the time.

Captain Fernandez put to sea in a howling south-easter – just the weather he needed for a fast passage north to the fishing stations. Soon after he left the wind increased to hurricane force. A large

schooner running reefed before the wind, however, should not have been overwhelmed by such conditions.

That night, the late Mr. H. R. Stephan, owner of the vessel, dreamt that the *Maria Frederica* had foundered with all hands near Dassen Island. Telegrams were sent to Saldanha and other ports asking for news of her; but no news came. There was not a body, not a spar or lifebuoy washed ashore to suggest the fate of the *Maria Frederica*.

In May 1932 the broken hull of a wooden sailing vessel drifted keel upwards on to the rocks of St. Helena Bay. It had been brought in by heavy seas; and it lay there, covered with barnacles, rising and sinking in the swell. Customs officers examined the wreck, but they were unable to identify it.

Fragments of wood that broke adrift revealed signs of scorching; and the theory was advanced that the ship had been

captured by pirates years ago and set on fire after looting. The ship would then have burnt down to the waterline and sunk. Sand would have filled the remains of the hull, and it would have rested on the bottom until strong currents scoured out the sand. Then the old ship would become a derelict, drifting just below the surface, a menace to navigation.

The son and grandson of Captain Fernandez, remembering the *Maria Frederica*, made inquiries about the hulk at St. Helena Bay. They found that certain details tallied with the description of the lost schooner; and they are now convinced that after fifty years the *Maria Frederica* reappeared like a ghost. The most important clue, to my mind, was that of the scorched planking. A disastrous fire would account for the total loss of a schooner, which could hardly have been destroyed by the sea during a short coastal passage. The weather, of course, would have swamped the boats.

Today Cape Town still possesses a little fleet of sailing ships – the schooners that go north each year to fill their holds with salted snoek. A few of them were built in the Cape Peninsula, though I am bound to say that the most shapely of them came, years ago, from other ports.

Titania, the queen of the fleet, has the lines and appearance of a cruising yacht. She was originally one of the Grand Bank's fishing fleet, built to ride out the gales of the North Atlantic. *Forget-me-not* was a Dover trawler, an oak ketch, still as seaworthy as the day she left the builder's slip, forty years ago. *Kernwood* is a schooner, built to a design such as one sees in few commercial vessels – she, too, might once have been a yacht'.

The ketch *Boy Russell*, though not so graceful as some of her sisters, gives an impression of strength. She comes home year after year with the largest catch – more

than 100,000 in a good season of six months. The total catch by all the snoeking vessels often amounts to a million fish, worth about £80,000. Most of it goes to Mauritius; but coloured people everywhere in South Africa regard snoek as the finest fish in the ocean.

Snoeking is unlike any other fishing in the world. It is a mysterious game, for no one knows how the snoek will migrate, or when they will bite. Instinct is the old fisherman's guide. The snoek may be seen passing beneath the ship in countless thousands; yet until they rise to the surface it is useless attempting to make a catch. Then, without warning, the water for miles around will boil and shimmer with fish. That is the moment the crew have been waiting for, and in a flash every man is hauling the snoek on board.

Hooks without barbs are used. Shark-skin is the favourite bait – but the strips of

grey skin must be placed on the hook so that the grain feels smooth between the teeth of the voracious fish. Snoek will not touch rough bait. Many people look upon this technique of the bait as a fisherman's superstition; but it is a fact.

The snoek fishermen are paid by results, and they work with tireless arms while the snoek are biting to secure a record catch. It is exhausting work. The snoek is a powerful fish, weighing up to seven pounds; it fights all the way to the deck, and must be released skilfully from the hook. Even the cleverest hands receive painful, poisonous wounds in the course of a season.

For days, and sometimes for weeks, the snoek evade the fishermen. Currents and the water temperature may influence the shoals; but so little is known of the snoek's habits that it is impossible to predict with certainty when or where they

will appear. The fishermen know that sunrise is often a good time, however, and that the snoek dislike cold water intensely. In December, the first shoals are observed near the coast at Walvis Bay, apparently coming in from mid-ocean. About May they migrate in a southerly direction, vanishing entirely off the Cape of Good Hope in August.

The departure of the snoek for the Cape is the signal for the start of the race sailed by the fishing fleet every year. It is 700 miles from Walvis Bay to Table Bay; and with favourable winds a schooner, driven hard, covers the distance in about five or six days.

When head winds and heavy seas are encountered, it is a slow passage and a hard one for all hands. Then the schooners lurch wearily into Table Bay, sails and rigging coated white with salt,

boats and gear tightly lashed, crews in sea-worn oilskins.

The fitting-out of the schooners is carried on in the good old-fashioned way; and I am sure that the toughest shellback would cast no disapproving eye over these ships when they are ready for sea. Masts are scraped and oiled until they gleam like new pencils. Wire and rope splices, standing and running rigging, spars and sails, are faultless when the proud schooners haul out for the fishing-grounds. Such are the last of the great, white-winged fleet that once crowded Table Bay Docks. Though most of them have auxiliary engines nowadays, I think they will carry sail for many years to come. May they have fair winds and full holds on all their voyages.

A motor-boat that served as an armed “cruiser,” a water-boat that was turned into a salvage ship, an ex-naval pinnace that has made long coastal voyages – these little ships and many other remarkable small craft are at home in Table Bay Docks.

The heroic story of the motor-boat *Tou Tou* is told by a brass plate in her cockpit which reads:

“This launch served in the East African campaign as an armed cruiser. Captured and sank three German gunboats with assistance of sister launch, *Mi Mi*.”

The strange naval expedition to Lake Tanganyika was planned by the British Admiralty early in 1915, when a German “Navy” of three gunboats commanded the lake. It was impossible to send a large vessel overland in sections, to be

assembled on the spot, at short notice, so the launches *Tou Tou* and *Mi Mi* were railed to the Belgian Congo and transported by road and water until they reached the scene of action. Shallow draught launches, they were, with motors that gave them fifteen knots. Without that speed they could never have tackled the large, well-armed German gunboats.

Commander G. Spicer-Simpson, R.N., was placed in command of the twenty-eight officers and ratings who made up the secret British Lake Tanganyika Squadron. It was a difficult journey. In some places the launches were hauled on ox-wagons, while the sweating seamen hacked a path through forest and bush. Sometimes, at the end of a day, the expedition had covered only a mile. On the Lualaba River progress was barred by sandbanks, rocks and floating islands of grass. Heat, mosquitoes and malaria added to the sufferings of these sailors who had come so far from the

sea. The whole journey from the Thames to Lake Tanganyika lasted seven months.

At last the two forty-foot launches floated safely on the waters of the lake. Although hundreds of natives had taken part in the transport operations, no word of the British enterprise had reached the Germans. The launches, each with a maxim and a three-pounder gun in the bows, were ready for battle.

It was on December 26th, 1915, that the German gunboat *Kingani* – a large wooden steamer with a Hotchkiss gun-steamed past the British naval base on patrol at her full speed of six knots. *Tou Tou* and *Mi Mi* took her by surprise. They opened fire at two thousand yards, shell after shell striking the German until she hauled down her ensign – on fire and sinking.

The *Kingani* went down in shallow water, and soon the resourceful launch crews had raised her, mounted a ten pounder gun and

renamed her *Fi Fi*. Even then the Germans were unaware of the presence of the British expedition.

Thus the German gunboat, *Hedwig von Wissman*, was doomed from the moment she came within range of the British guns on February 9th, 1916. She, too, caught fire as the high explosive shells struck home. After an action lasting only a few minutes her crew abandoned the blazing wreck and were picked up by the launches.

The next victim was the German motor-launch *Wami*, filled with troops, which was beached and blown up when the British squadron appeared.

The third German gunboat, a powerful and well-armed vessel named *Graf von Gotson* remained. The launches, even with the aid of *Fi Fi*, could not hope to emerge victorious from a battle with this enemy's four-inch guns. The Germans, however, settled the matter by blowing her up – they

knew how useful she would be as a transport for British troops.

And so the White Ensign flew unchallenged on Lake Tanganyika, and the *Tou Tou* came back in triumph to Table Bay Docks.

There is nothing neglected about the little salvage steamer *Chub*, in spite of thirty-four years of strenuous and varied work. She was built as a water-boat and toiled for many years at the Simon's Town Naval Dockyard in that capacity. During the South African War she might have been seen with her narrow decks crowded with Boer prisoners, ferrying them from the shore to the transports in the bay.

For years, however, there was little adventure in the life of the *Chub*. During the Great War she acted as examination vessel – though even then south-easterly gales, and not enemy attacks, provided all the excitement she knew.

Scrapped by the naval authorities at last, the *Chub* was purchased by a salvage firm. I saw her leave Table Bay for East London one evening, rising to the long seas that came up from the south as she set out on the longest passage she had made for many years.

Near East London lay the sunken Elder Dempster liner *Cariboo*, with her cargo of copper bars. Divers worked for months from the deck of the *Chub*, blasting away the steel plates of the wreck. The task was hampered by strong currents and heavy weather; but more than twelve tons of copper were brought safely on board the *Chub*.

From East London the *Chub* steamed north to the tropics, for there was talk of salving cargo from the wrecked *Tecumseh* at Lourenço Marques. Then she returned to the Cape. Her next voyage took her to Saldanha Bay, where many old wooden

men-o'-war and merchant ships lie beneath the calm harbour – treasure ships, so they say. The *Chub* has embarked on a career of romance late in life; but now it may lead her to scenes and experiences in strange contrast with her quiet years as a dockyard water-boat.

Among the small craft, the coasters and fishing cutters, in the inner basin at Table Bay Docks you will find the *Theodora* and her owner, Captain Charles Broker. An old naval pinnace, forty-seven feet long, built of double-skin teak. “A bit narrow-gutted, perhaps,” Captain Broker once admitted to me, “but I would go anywhere in her.”

He has made several astonishing passages in this schooner rigged pinnace. The motor sometimes gives trouble; but Captain Broker always beats back to port under sail. I always think of the *Theodora* as I saw her, scarred and battered by the

sea after a voyage of three thousand miles up the coast to Mossamedes, in Angola, and back.

The *Theodora* is Captain Broker's home. He has a little cabin aft with a teak table, comfortable bunks, a wireless set and books. There he studies his charts and plans fresh adventures. He would not change places with any liner captain or rich yacht owner.

Moored near the *Theodora* sometimes you may see the little coasting steamer *Luna*. A peaceful trader as a rule, the *Luna* has snatched much cargo from lost ships before the sea covered its victims: guns from H.M.S. *Sybil*, balls from the Portuguese liner *Lisboa*, motor-cars from the *Haddon Hall*, copper from the *Hypatia*. You can see little relics from these ships in the *Luna's* saloon – a tiny place in which every fitting has a story of its own.

Little ships, old and tired, resting in odd corners of the docks, listening to the shunting of maize trucks, the whine of steam and the raging of the south-easter they know so well.

5

“A yellow tobacco bag full of diamonds!” The master of the Table Bay dredger shook his head. He had seen many queer things come up in the buckets – but no diamonds.

Then the man who had questioned him so eagerly told his story. He had brought the diamonds with him from Luderitzbucht; and all the way down the coast he worried about that tobacco bag hidden in his suitcase. Would the police be waiting for him? Would the Customs men find them?

As the steamer entered Table Bay Docks the white helmets worn by two policemen on the quay caught his nervous eye. “They are after me,” he thought; and then he

dropped the yellow tobacco bag through the port-hole.

But they were not waiting to arrest him. The Customs officials hardly glanced at his baggage. And the yellow tobacco bag is still lying in the mud at the bottom of Table Bay Docks.

This may not be a strictly moral tale – but it is true. For all I know, the man who threw diamonds into the sea still watches the dredger at work, and thinks of his lost fortune.

The dredgers of Table Bay are not the sort of ships to please a seaman’s eye. Ugly, shapeless hulls, masses of exposed machinery, tall funnels – they are more like monstrous jabberwocks than ships. But there is a certain fascination in their task. Their crews never know what may come up in the sand.

Watch them at work. A slow and regular metallic clanking swish of mud and water. The endless chain of buckets works round a "ladder" which can be lowered to the depth required. The double hull has a deep well in the centre to allow the buckets to pass.

Grinding, noisy toil it is. The buckets suffer heavily from wear and tear, and great ingenuity is shown in reducing the damage.

Suction dredgers do their work more silently. They are the vacuum cleaners of the harbour; and they, too, find strange objects in their haul. The record, I think, is held by the Durban dredger that caught a young whale, fifteen feet long, against the suction pipe.

The ports of South Africa possess some of the largest and most powerful dredgers in the world. There is the *Rietbok*, for example, which can suck up more than

twenty thousand tons of sand in one working day. She steamed out from England to Table Bay in thirty-five days, several years ago.

While large suction dredgers have nothing to fear during an ocean voyage, the bucket dredger, with her split hull and top-hammer, is a hard craft to handle in a sea-way. I remember meeting the bucket dredger, *Sir Thomas Price*, when she arrived in Table Bay after a wild passage from East London a few years ago. Captain H. S. Hodges was her master; before that he was mate of the famous little Irish yacht, *Saoirse*, in which Conor O'Brien sailed round the world.

They lowered the buckets for the passage to reduce the weight aloft, and put four hundred tons of ballast into her. "Lord, how she rolled!" said Captain Hodges. "We had the dread Agulhas roll' on the beam, and every sea swept her decks."

The great gap in the bows where the bucket chain passes down hampered her progress. Head seas came pounding up and thumped against the hull so that the men on board wondered whether the rivets and bulkheads would hold. A lighter in tow broke adrift – the twelve-inch coir rope parted like string – and the dredger was battered heavily as she swung round to send a new line across. A memorable passage, proving that even a harbour dredger may have her adventures.

In close attendance on the dredgers are the hoppers – great iron barges with central holds, which may be opened at the pull of a lever. The barge shudders as the cargo drops out into deep water. Water tight bulkheads keep her afloat when the doors open below.

If old anchors possessed a market value, the dredgers of Table Bay would find a

profitable side-line recovering and selling them. For the floor of the bay is a nautical museum. It is littered with sunken ships, fragments of ships, gear and lost cargoes. There was a time when anchors could be sold as scrap-iron, but today they are merely a nuisance. The fluke of a huge, old-time anchor, caught in a dredge-bucket, delays the work. Romantic finds they are, strongly suggestive of historic disasters; but the dredging crews would rather let them rest for ever in the sand of Table Bay.

Old coins are always welcomed by the men of the dredgers. Nothing like the find made by an Elbe River dredger in 1929 – when a chest of French gold and silver, loot from the Napoleonic wars, came up – has come to the surface of Table Bay. Nevertheless, coins dropped into the bay or lost when ships went down do reappear from time to time. A Georgian coin, set in a lump of

barnacles; a spade guinea dated 1770; these and much other odd money have been dragged up from the mud.

Chinese porcelain is a common find – all the Dutch East India ships carried it, and enough was lost to pave the floor of the bay. In the docks, crockery bearing the crests of all the steamship lines is recovered; some of the dredging masters collect it in their cabins to remind them of fine old steamships which have gone.

Rifles, typewriters, elephant tusks, cannons and cannon balls, snuff-boxes, wire rigging, and quaint glass bottles, copper sheathing, binoculars – these are some of the things that vary the dredger's diet of sand.

One day, perhaps, a yellow tobacco-bag will drop out of a bucket and a handful of diamonds will gleam in the sun.

“No one is poor who lives by the shore,” runs the old saying. While I doubt very much whether the beachcombers of the shore that stretches north from Table Bay could live entirely on what they find, I do know that they have made valuable finds from time to time.

These beachcombers are not the disreputable characters of Pacific fiction. They are fishermen, farmers, odd-job men of the coastal belt who keep a watchful eye on the hard sandy beaches and the sea. They know where to find Bushman pottery in the dunes; they recite the local treasure legends and lead parties in search of them willingly – for a consideration. Not an expensive way of buying romance, after all.

Watch the beachcomber pacing the long, long beaches – the white sands that stretch from Woodstock Beach north past

Milnerton and Blaauwberg and Melkbosch Strand to Bok Bay – watch him at work after a nor'-west gale has stirred up the sea-floor and swept lost fragments ashore. He walks with head bent forward, scanning the wet sands, the ripples and marks left by the ebb tide, the shells and seaweed. He can read signs that mean nothing to those who are not of his trade. If there is treasure here it will not escape him.

His keen old eyes have seen this beach strewn with carpets, cases of whisky and sweets. That was after the loss of the mail steamer *Tantallon Castle* on Robben Island. Another wreck supplied candles and condensed milk, unspoilt by the sea. Once a huge cargo of tea in tinfoil came up with the breakers. They tried to use the tea, but it was impregnated with salt; so the beachcombers made piggots of lead out of the wrappings.

Then there was the memorable day when a deck cargo of timber was swept from a steamer and drifted ashore to litter the whole coast from Blaauwberg to Bok Bay. Wood of all varieties is the most common find, from ships' derricks, doors and gratings, down to thin boxwood.

One of my beachcomber friends described the funeral of a small wooden sailing ship years ago. "They towed her out of Table Bay Docks with nothing but rats on board," he said. "No, the rats did not know she was doomed. Between Robben Island and Blaauwberg beach they made full sail, and cast her adrift. She came pitching along towards the Blaauwberg rocks, struck an outlying reef and remained fast, her sails still drawing. Then five great seas struck her. She vanished before our eyes – there was nothing left but matchwood when the last sea passed over her."

This man owns a little boat which has paid for itself again and again. He has fished from it and shot seals for their skins and oil. Sometimes he visits the little rocky Bird Islet off Blaauwberg to collect duikers' eggs. And when the sea is very calm he searches for the old treasure ship his grandfather once showed him.

"I was young then – I never thought of fixing the position by marks on shore," he told me. "But I saw the ship through the clear water after a south-easter, lying on her side with bars of silver in her hold. If I find her again I'll mark the spot, even if I have to drop my best crayfish net." A Woodstock fishing boat once raised an old brass cannon in the nets; but it was too heavy to lift into the boat, the nets tore and a valuable relic was lost.

Then there is the story (which my beachcomber swears is true) of the two Melkbosch farmers who found an iron box

left by the tide. There was a coloured boy with them, and they sent him for an axe. Then they opened the box and when the boy returned they showed him that it was empty. But my friend declares that the box was full of money, and that those two farmers were prosperous for the rest of their lives.

"I once found a coin myself," said the beachcomber. "I was following my grandfather, who was shooting buck in the bush near Blaauwberg. My eyes were on the ground, looking for the spoor, when I saw the coin. I took it home, polished and polished, until I found it was a Spanish gold coin. My grandfather made me give it to the Museum.

"Perhaps there are more gold coins in the bush. The Dutch East India Company's wagon-tracks to Saldanha ran through there – you can still see the old road. The only thing I have at home now is a

porcelain bottle from one of the wrecks in Table Bay. A chest of Spanish coins now – that would be real good luck...”

Strictly speaking, of course, all treasure trove should be handed over to the Government. Flotsam, which means portions of a wreck or her cargo, and jetsam, goods thrown overboard to lighten a ship, do not belong to the finder. In practice it is only when large quantities of goods drift ashore that Customs Officers guard the coast. Heavy fines were inflicted recently when farmers in the Mossel Bay district gathered items from a general cargo that washed ashore there.

Flotsam may be dangerous. Seventy bags of high explosive – nitro-glycerine and gun cotton – were found in shallow water on the Bluff beach at Durban recently. It is unlikely that a man-o’-war or even a merchantman would jettison such a cargo. The Defence Authorities searched their

records for entries dealing with the dumping of defective ammunition or explosives, and could find nothing to explain the strange find. The origin of this explosive flotsam will probably remain a mystery.

The botanist who turns beachcomber on the South African coast will find much of intense interest. The Mozambique and Agulhas currents on the East Coast, and the Brazilian and South Atlantic connecting currents on the west bring floating seeds, plants, logs of wood, pumice and corals from far countries. Some of the seeds germinate when they reach the South African coasts after voyages of thousands of miles lasting for months.

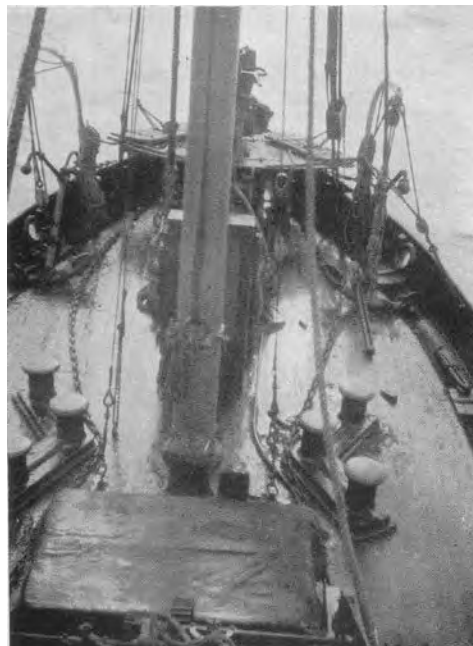
Attempts have been made to harvest the seaweed so plentiful on the Cape coast, but the enterprise failed. In other parts of the world, however, beachcombers find

regular work gathering seaweed for the extraction of the iodine.

The beachcomber's chief haul, as I have said, is firewood. The Orange River brings enormous quantities of wood down to the sea – north and south of the river the bays and beaches are stacked high with it. Sometimes it is possible to identify a log that has drifted from the East Indies to South Africa.

There is no knowing what the ocean currents may cast up, for stagnation is unknown in the sea and the great flow of the waters is never checked. Even the strong Agulhas current is variable; the arrows shown on the chart must be taken only as an indication. But always there comes a day when currents and tides join forces to throw on land at last something that will catch the beachcomber's eye.

There is treasure and mystery on the beaches for those who know where to seek such things.



Foredeck of a whaler in which the author went hunting off the South African coast.

CHAPTER 13

GREAT FALLS, RUINS AND LAKES

“MOSI-OA-TUNYA!” The Mashona name for the Victoria Falls makes you hear the thunder of the “smoke that sounds.” You may sense, too, something of the old mysteries hidden in the spray of Africa’s greatest wonder.

These Falls have claimed many human lives. How many natives have been swept into the abyss in the past will never be known. But before the white man came there was not a tribe, not a hut within sixty miles of the cataracts. The natives say there is a spirit, greatly feared, in the vapour of the Victoria Falls; and that deep in the Boiling Pot there dwells a monster that appears, at intervals of many years, to seize a victim.

“Musa-l-nunya,” the Arabs called the Falls – the “end of the world.” There is a sinister fascination in these roaring waters

that makes most people who stand on the edge think of death. It is a place where even the normal man and woman may experience that queer suicidal urge to drop forward into the maelstrom.

If you wait long enough at the Victoria Falls, they say, all your friends will visit you at least once. Certainly, there are few remote places in the world which have drawn so many visitors to gaze and marvel. Every hunter and adventurer in Southern Africa must pass this way. It has been the starting-point and the half-way house of men who have made history north and south of the Zambesi. Yet less than eighty years ago the Victoria Falls were but a native rumour, followed up and turned into reality by David Livingstone.

Rightly, the Falls have been left almost as Livingstone found them. A white, pleasant hotel now stands on the fringe of the jungle; and a bridge has been flung across

the chasm of the Boiling Pot. But the Rhodesians will have none of those distracting marks of civilisation that have taken away some of the glory of Niagara.

No longer do you meet a hundred buffalo in the Rain Forest as Chapman and Baines, the explorers, did in 1862. But the baboons still feast and fight in the trees near the hotel; the egrets flutter like a white cloud over the river and vultures circle in the blue. In these waters there has been no massacre of the hippos, though they have attacked canoes and caused many fatalities.

One of the earliest tragedies of the Victoria Falls involving white people was the result of a canoe being overturned by a hippo. Two men, two women and a baby and the usual crew of black paddlers struggled in the swift stream above the Falls. Two of the white visitors were drowned, but the baby was rescued by a

paddler and restored to the mother. It is satisfactory to be able to record that the native was pensioned for life.

During the construction of the famous railway bridge – a masterpiece of engineering – two lives were lost. When you stand in front of the hotel and see the slender silhouette like a steel rainbow four hundred feet above the Boiling Pot, you will marvel that no more than two were killed in such a daring feat. It would have been easier, and safer, to have taken the bridge across another gorge; but Rhodes himself selected this spot.

“I want the trains to stop on the centre of the bridge,” declared Rhodes. “I want the spray from the Falls to wash the trains as they cross the bridge.” For many years the trains did stop between the sickening precipices; but when I travelled north to the Congo a few years ago the custom had been abandoned. Those are breathless

moments, even now, as the long north-bound train crawls for 650 feet across the three spans of the bridge.

Rockets were used when the bridge construction was started, to hurl lines carrying a transporter cable from cliff to cliff. The bridge was built out simultaneously from both sides, meeting with perfect accuracy on April 1st, 1905. Before the girders were placed in position, a canvas "bo 'sun's chair" was used to carry men and material over the gorge.

M. Georges Imbault, the fearless chief construction engineer, made the first journey.

Imbault also carried out another nerve-racking task when the time came to clear away the steel rope and pulleys that hung below the bridge. A bonus was offered, but no workman would tackle the job. So Imbault was lowered on a small plank, and

he worked with both hands to release the pulleys.

One day a girder slipped, killing a white mechanic and sending a native to his death in the Boiling Pot.

Yet men have fallen into that vortex at the foot of the Victoria Falls and have lived. While the bridge-builders were at work, Trooper Ramsay of the Northern Rhodesia Police one day paddled a canoe from Livingstone during the flood season. For seven miles the merciless current swept him downstream until he came to the lip of the Falls.

There man and canoe parted company and dropped four hundred feet into the Boiling Pot. A policeman and several others watched the terrible scene, then rushed down to the edge of the swirling waters. One man made a line fast round his waist, ventured into the Boiling Pot and gripped Ramsay as the current bore him past. Both

men emerged alive and unharmed, thus ending happily a true story of magnificent courage and luck.

A naval seaman, on leave from the Africa Squadron, was not so fortunate. During the dry season the Falls dwindle away – from a gigantic series of breaking waves they become a few thin streams. The doomed sailor set out one exceptionally dry year to cross the very edge of the Falls to Livingstone Island. He reckoned without the force of those mighty waters; for streams which appear as trickles at a distance are dangerous enough when you slip into them. The sailor put his weight on a shifting stone and was instantly lost. They found his body just below the surface within a foot of the great drop, wedged between rocks.

Mysterious indeed was the discovery of the body of a young man some years ago. There is a path leading to the aptly named

Knife Edge which only those with steady heads should take. Below this path the body was found, in a sitting position on a ledge of rock. It was thought the man had fallen through the deceptive undergrowth and bush, and had injured his spine.

In his pockets were fifteen half-sovereigns and a railway ticket to Elisabethville in the Belgian Congo. But from that day to this his identity has never been established.

Only once have the Victoria Falls been featured in the newspapers of the world as the scene of a murder. That was in July, 1930, when Mrs. Una Kirby of Pretoria was attacked by a native and slipped over the edge in the struggle that followed.

Native troops were summoned immediately. Mrs. Kirby's companion reported the crime, and an impassable cordon was thrown round the area. A strong guard was placed on the Victoria Falls Bridge.

Late that night a native wearing torn, blood-stained clothing tried to break through the cordon at the bridge; and in his effort to escape arrest, he crashed over the gorge. Two hundred feet down a rock stopped his progress. Corporal Jordan of the Northern Rhodesia Police was lowered over the edge, and brought the native back to safety. But the man – who was, beyond doubt, the murderer – died on the way to hospital.

Attempts to recover the body of Mrs. Kirby lasted for weeks, and were finally successful. After a long search by land and air, the body was located with the aid of powerful field-glasses. Then three very brave men were lowered in a specially constructed cage to the base of the Falls. Drenched in spray during the forty minutes' descent, they reached the body and were hauled slowly back to the summit.

“Mosi-oa-Tunya!” What tales are in your mighty voice. Will that thunder ever be stilled? The natives say that three hundred years ago the Falls were in a different place. Recent air photographs show two lines of weakness radiating from the great cleft in the Western Cataract. This erosion suggests that sometime in the future the present line of the Falls will be abandoned. Fifty or a hundred years hence South Africa may no longer draw travellers from the furthest corners of the earth to experience the wonder that Livingstone felt as he stared awe-struck at the torrent which he named in honour of his Queen.

Africa yields tantalising glimpses of her mysterious past to explorers. The relics of lost cities such as Zimbabwe and other Rhodesian ruins must make the archaeologist feel he is standing on the

very threshold of great discovery. Yet the ruins are still a riddle which each scientist answers according to his own theories.

Some have given to Zimbabwe the romance of grey old age and Phoenician, Chaldean, Sabeian or Persian origin. Others declare that these crumbling walls were nothing but large kaffir kraals built in comparatively recent times.

When faced with such intricate problems as this, I believe in questioning the man on the spot and dragging the local traditions of the natives into the light. It is a queer thing that so many busy excavators and scientists have neglected this source of information. Yet from the days of the Portuguese inland explorers – who were in the field in the sixteenth century – right down to Miss Caton-Thompson and Professor Frobenius, you will find hardly a mention of what the

natives of Rhodesia think about the wonder in their midst.

Take first the strong case built up in favour of the antiquity of the ruins. Frobenius declares that they are similar to those of Hampi in South India; he detects in both places a Mesopotamian influence, and dates Zimbabwe about 4,000 B.C. There are symbols on the temple walls which have been read as evidence of phallic worship. Dr. P. S. Nazaroff, a recent investigator, saw what he believed to be traces of the Zoroastrian era, and thought Zimbabwe was an outpost of the ancient Persian Empire. Each learned traveller, as I have said, puts forward a theory of his own.

Mining engineers have been able to state definitely that gold worth about £75,000,000 was taken out of the country before the white man came; but they do not enter into historical controversy. Gold

and ruins, however, are closely linked all over Rhodesia. It has been suggested that Zimbabwe, Tati, Mombo and the rest were strongholds from which foreign adventurers controlled the gold workers.

Finally, the supporters of the ancient school point out that the present native inhabitants of Rhodesia display no skill in working gold; nor do they retain a vestige of the civilisation which a nation exporting gold and trading with other peoples might be expected to possess. They have not inherited gold in any form. They do not build elliptical palaces today such as you see at Zimbabwe. No new acropolis rises from the bush. When you listen to these arguments you feel that the French cartographer who wrote "Monomotapae Imperium" across this portion of his map was right; that here indeed were King Solomon's Mines, and that from here came the famous gold of Ophir.

The natives of Rhodesia, however, tell a different story. The late Captain F. C. Selous cross-examined many of them in the course of his hunting expeditions, and they told him that their fathers had the art of extracting gold until comparatively recent times. A native named Chapa, who was chamberlain to Lobengula, was still living in 1911, eighty years old; and he declared that the ruins were inhabited by the Makalakas until the Matabele drove them out of the country in 1840. The Makalakas themselves say that their ancestors paid the Arabs to build these places. It is known that an Arab – said to be a descendant of the builders – visited Rhodesia in Lobengula's time to look for the old gold mines. He was executed as a spy. Who knows what secret died with him when the assegai fell?

There were Arabs trading in gold and ivory when the first Portuguese entered the country. Certain early Portuguese

writers, moreover, confirm the statement that the natives knew something of working gold centuries ago.

There is proof, too, that the natives even today have not entirely lost the art of building with dressed stone. Zimbabwe is not an architectural wonder – to some experts – the oval or round buildings suggest crude African native workmanship. There is no sign of really ancient weathering. The walls were so carelessly erected that it is difficult to imagine them lasting for a thousand years.

If foreigners built these temples, they must have left relics behind them. There are many remains of Portuguese medieval missions in the country – a priest's private seal here, a silver plate, a cross or bronze breech-loading cannon there. But the theoretical army of invaders in ancient times have left nothing by which their legions can be identified.

Much importance has been attached to pottery found at different levels beneath the floors of the Zimbabwe ruins. It was impossible to establish the age of fragments of Chinese pottery dug out of an excavation which had been ransacked by many explorers – some, indeed, looked very much as though previous parties had left their broken teacups in the hole! But in 1929 Miss Caton-Thompson was given permission to open up an entirely new area of unbroken cement flooring. No Chinese porcelain was found; but foreign glass-beads were there in abundance. These beads were recognised as a type of cheap trade goods which reached Zanzibar no earlier than the eighth century. Consequently the ruins could not have been built earlier than A.D. 800 and possibly came into existence as late as A.D. 1200. There is one loop-hole. Buildings were added to Great Zimbabwe from time to time; and the ruin explored by Miss

Caton-Thompson may have been a late addition. In this great mystery there is as yet no certainty – the excavators have touched only the fringe of the enigma.

Fever and dozens of other troublesome African diseases make research work difficult in the Rhodesian bush. Many other lost cities await the spade of the archaeologist. At Inyanga, in Southern Rhodesia, there are miles of terraced walls along the slopes of a mountain range. No organised party has investigated them. An urn containing copper bangles was dug up by a farmer not long ago, and experts agreed that they were the work of some ancient people who understood the art of refining minerals.

North of the Zambesi there is a ruined city much greater than Zimbabwe, with walls and brick towers and slave dungeons hewn out of the solid rock. It has been visited, but that is all.

Then there is Sofala – a little tropical backwater, south of Beira, that was once a famous and flourishing port. The Arabs had a colony there centuries before the Portuguese, under Albuquerque, drove them out. Most of the gold from the Rhodesian mines, it is said, passed through Sofala – great caravans that came under armed escort through the bush.

In 1505, when the Portuguese built their fort at Sofala, the Rhodesian mines were worked out. But there was still alluvial gold in the rivers. The Makalakas washed it and exchanged it for trade goods – worth only a fraction of the value of the gold – with the Portuguese.

Legends have it that there was a chain of forts all the way from Sofala to Zimbabwe. The route has never been explored by scientists. It may be that some clue lies buried in the ruins of Sofala – under the

sand that has covered the Arab settlement monuments, the mosques, the stores and the buildings of the early Portuguese.

The glamour of gold and of departed glory hangs heavily over fever-haunted Sofala. Amid the broken walls of the old fort it is easy to picture the Portuguese soldiers in their baking armour; the three-deckers from Lisbon in the anchorage; the gay colours, the excitement, the shouts of triumph as a caravan loaded with gold ingots emerged from the green and steaming jungle to safety and the sea.

Yes, here is the threshold of great discovery. The man who sits down to write the true history of this African epic will have material as romantic as anything provided by the Roman Empire. But we are still in the realm of theories. Zimbabwe broods silently, inscrutable as the Sphinx, over her dark and undiscovered past.

Once there was an inland sea called Ngami in the Kalahari Desert. To the east of it stretched an enormous lake known to the natives as Makarikari; and to the west another lake, the Etosha Pan.

Within living memory these three great sheets of water have vanished. Can they be restored, and thus throw open an area for cultivation in which, according to expert opinion, three million white people could settle?

That is the riddle of the lost lakes. In hard times, when farmers complain that the land is drying up, people in South Africa turn again and again to the schemes for making the desert blossom.

David Livingstone discovered Ngami in 1849. "We could detect no horizon where we stood ... nor could we form any idea of the extent of the lake except from the

reports of the inhabitants of the district,” he wrote. Livingstone had nearly died of thirst during his famous journey across the desert to “this fine-looking sheet of water.” Had he known it, he was the first and also the last white man to see Lake Ngami in all its glory.

Later travellers found a mere grass depression in the desert containing muddy pools. Donald Bain, the well-known South African hunter and desert guide, told me that he once motored across Ngami in a cloud of dust. Only at rare intervals does the water of the Okavango River fill a portion of the former lake.

“The lake dried up and the dead fish and animals were devoured by the vultures,” say the Bushmen. It is still possible, however, to obtain water by digging below the surface; and there is good grazing for cattle in the area.

The territory, years ago, became a refuge for oppressed and conquered tribes – Damaras and Hottentots who had fled from the Germans in the west, Bushmen, and the remnants of the Mambukushu, who had been raided by Arab slavers for centuries. The country in which Ngami lies is larger than France; and the desert surrounding the old lake supplied ample protection.

Once the possibilities of the Kalahari were realised by scientists, the problem of the disappearance of the lakes was carefully studied. Ngami lies 2,000 feet above sea level; and all agreed that the lake dried up owing to the choking of the feeder rivers by sand and grass.

It is thought that the great Zambesi once fed Ngami; for the old area of the lake was fifty thousand square miles. Scientists have traced the faint course of a river leading out of Ngami in a southerly direction and joining the mighty Orange River far away

in the Union of South Africa. That is the link between the “lost lakes” and the present dry climate of South Africa.

“Restore the lakes, and make a garden of the Kalahari and a large part of South Africa,” declares a group of distinguished scientists. The late Professor E. H. L. Schwarz, of Grahamstown, originated the theory, and worked out a practical scheme to put his stupendous idea into effect.

If it is ever carried out, it will be the greatest irrigation scheme the world has ever known. By damming certain rivers in the north, Professor Schwarz proposed turning them into their old channels so that the lakes would be filled. This would moisten the hot atmosphere of the desert and precipitate rain over a huge area.

“South Africa is becoming a Sahara,” said Professor Schwarz. “Take warning from the ruined cities of North Africa – Greek and Roman cities that flourished and died

for lack of water. Dam up the pirate rivers and restore the old conditions.”

For years Schwarz cried alone in the wilderness. Then, at intervals, Parliament discussed his scheme. In 1926 a reconnaissance expedition was sent out to explore the possibilities – engineers and scientists in motor-cars, and Colonel Sir Pierre van Ryneveld, of the South African Air Force, with a squadron of aeroplanes.

The only important discovery was made by the airmen, whose photographs proved that the Kunene River once flowed into the Etosha Pan. This had been one of the strongest points in the Schwarz theory. The Kunene today forms the border between South West Africa and Angola. Instead of supplying the interior, it rushes swiftly to the sea – races through deep gorges with its stolen waters.

Today the Etosha Pan, like Ngami, is a waterless sea. Seventy miles long and fifty

miles broad, the Etosha Pan shines blue and white under the sun. It is covered with salt, which draws huge herds of game of every species. Here lions, wolves and jackals prey on gemsbuck, zebra and blue wildebeest. Thousands of whitening skeletons litter the surface – victims of these dangers of the night. In the swamp scores of elephants have perished – and men, too, who have vanished for ever with their wagons in the treacherous depths of the “lost lake.”

Etosha, Ngami, Makarikari – are these the key to the future prosperity of South Africa? One day, I think, public opinion will turn in favour of trying the gigantic experiment. It will cost millions; but it may make more millions if the old reservoirs are filled and the furnace of the Kalahari is quenched.

CHAPTER 14

“HEART OF DARKNESS” TODAY

AFRICAN travel is so easy nowadays that it is difficult to step beyond the influence of tourist agencies. The safari is giving way to motorcars. North Africa is fashionable. East Africa offers luxury in “the blue.” Every corner of South Africa may be visited without hardship. Even the sinister West Coast and its hinterland may be explored in moderate comfort.

In my search for a route still mysterious enough to be interesting I turned to a dark purple mass on the map of Africa – the Belgian Congo. Pretty folders describing the exotic charm of the country which Conrad called “Heart of Darkness” are not yet to be found in the offices of travel agents. One famous agency, indeed, warned me that a journey from Cape Town to the Congo mouth would be “far from easy or comfortable.” No ordinary

tourist, as far as they knew, had ever gone that way. They could not help me beyond Stanleyville.

Letters from British Vice-Consuls in the Congo now began to reach me. They advised me that, with luck, I should be able to get through without long delay anywhere if I started before the rainy season. There was a promise of adventure. A country in which you may or may not “get through” must certainly lie far from the track of the globe-trotter. Late in June I boarded the train that leaves Cape Town twice a week on the longest railway journey in Africa.

For nearly three thousand miles this train carries you northwards. Through the vines and orchards of the Paarl. Across the brown wastes of the Karoo and Bechuanaland. Past grey clouds against a crawling line of fire – the “sounding smoke” of the Victoria Falls at dawn. Still

northwards through the bush of Northern Rhodesia. Beyond the last British outpost at N'dola. On the fifth evening you reach the Belgian frontier station of Sakania, where you must leave the clean ^{Rhodesian} train and take your seat for dinner in the grimy saloon of the Chemin de Fer du Katanga.

Compartments in the Belgian train were furnished richly with curtains and tapes-tried walls. The wash-basins were so small that a ham-fisted man could not have washed both hands at once. Above my seat I found a notice in French and Flemish:

“In this country the mosquito is the chief enemy. Have you taken your quinine today? If not, attend to it immediately. Beware of the tsetse fly.”

Very soon I discovered a danger greater than mosquito or tsetse. All trains in the Congo are driven by fearless black maniacs. They rattle through the forest,

taking steep descents and rickety bridges without slackening speed. Rocket-bursts of sparks from the wood-burning locomotives send the monkeys gibbering back to their trees. When the line was first opened the engine drivers were white men. They drank so much that natives had to be found to take their places. I am not sure, however, that a whisky inspired European would not be safer than the sober demons who now control the trains of the Katanga. All night the nerve-shattering scream of the whistle was heard. The vanity of a black driver is such that he will not pass the smallest cluster of huts without this manifestation of the high estate to which he has risen.

In the morning, to my surprise, we reached Elisabethville safely. Here is a young Johannesburg, a mining camp growing into a rich city. A few years before the war untouched forest covered the plateau where Elisabethville now stands. Today

the rough tin shacks of the pioneers are seen next to modern cement business houses and pretty villas. It is a town of contrasts and extremes. Bitter, healthy cold of winter. Malaria and blackwater fever in sweltering summer. The death-rate among white children is pitifully heavy. Until they are five years old they are carried off by little ailments that would mean nothing in South Africa.

There is a bewildering Continental flavour about this Belgian settlement in the heart of Africa. At sundown the basket chairs in the street outside my hotel were filled with people shouting "garçon" and demanding sirops, cocktails and beer. Magnificent Alsations roamed among the drinkers. A Handley Page aeroplane, flying low, awoke the town with the droning of three engines. This beautiful white machine had come from Boma with the European mails,

thousands of miles over the rivers of the half-explored Kasai.

Black convicts, chained lightly neck to neck, marched past the hotel with their warders. White people rode in smart little motor-cars or on bicycles. Here was a mother pedalling up the road with a baby in a basket on the handle-bars. There was a young Belgian with a black and sinister beard, dressed like a hunter in enormous helmet and riding breeches. The military officers in their white tropical uniforms were sturdy fellows. They are training a black army, just as the French are doing further north. It may be unwise in the end; but there was no doubting the efficiency of the bare-footed regiments which came tramping down the Avenue de l'Etoile in faultless column of route.

A diamond-digger sat with me, talking of marvellous finds in the rivers of Angola. His hand trembled as he threw fifteen

grains of quinine down his throat and chased the bitter tablets with whisky. Two Mauritian half-castes and a Cape coloured man were drinking wine. In the Congo gentlemen of colour are equal to the white man and may sit at table with him.

Like many mining centres, Elisabethville has to live largely out of tins and bottles. Fruit and vegetables do not thrive. We were sated with tough meat at every meal, but beyond that there was little fresh food. So the grocers keep good stocks of delicacies pleasing to Belgian palates – such things as Russian caviar, tinned trout, *Pâte de foie gras* and *petits pois*. Greatest of all luxuries were iced oysters sent from Cape Town.

Every mansion and villa in Elisabethville has an immense ant-heap in the garden. These grotesque red mounds are put to all sorts of strange uses. Telegraph poles

and electric light standards are planted in them. Some people burrow into their ant-heaps and turn them into storerooms and garages. Others build summer houses on them. Ant-heaps may be used as ovens. Sometimes the ants return. There is a story that a man lost most of his motor car in this way. The ant is Africa's most voracious insect.

Elisabethville may be reached from Europe by a variety of routes. Cases of goods outside the stores bear the marks of Cape Town, Dar-es-Salaam and Beira. A new railway, one of the most important in Africa, has linked Elisabethville with Lobito Bay. But I am taking the Congo route to Europe – four stretches of railway and three of river. Once more I am in the hands of the fearless negroes of the footplate, jolting over the Manhika tableland to Bukama. A night and half a day of this breathless travel, and the majestic scene that I have been picturing



The *Prince Leopold*, in which the author travelled down the Lualaba River, Belgian Congo.

for weeks slides into view – the gleaming ribbon of the upper Congo. Here where the river moves slowly past the tin houses of Bukama it is called the Lualaba; but it is the same romantic river of Stanley, Burton, Livingstone and Conrad. My steamer, the stern-wheeler *Prince Leopold*, lay moored to the bank.

Three blasts of the siren brought me from my mosquito net at dawn. From Bukama the Lualaba runs almost due north through swamp and plain and palm forest for nearly four hundred miles to the rapids at Kongolo. I doubt whether there is another stretch of river in Africa so rich in life and colour.

The last of our cargo of palm oil casks was coming on board, natives rolling them down the steep river bank and up the gangway. They sang as they worked. A French doctor, bound for Lake Kivu and the Mountains of the Moon, to inspect

labour for the copper mines, chuckled as he listened to the artless Swaheli song.

“The white man is good.
The white man is kind.
The white man is generous.”

As the white foreman moved away the words changed.

“But the work is hard,
And the pay is small.
Ai brother. All together.”

The great paddle-wheel thrashed the green water, and the *Prince Leopold* was steaming downstream. There were so many sand-banks that it was impossible to follow a straight course for a minute at a time. An hour after leaving Bukama I saw the first crocodile, waiting at a game path to grip its victim by the nose. A lion beating the ground with its tail before springing is a terrifying sight; but the lurking, half-

hidden crocodile is one of Africa's sinister and revolting things.

Sometimes the engines stopped, and we groped cautiously round a corner; for there was seldom more than a fathom of water under the shallow hull. The captain was not a sailor, but a man trained on the inland waterways of Belgium. He was very much in the hands of his Baluba quartermasters, who knew every intricate channel along hundreds of miles of river. When the steamer did lift and switchback, sensationally over a sandbank it was usually because the channel had altered since the last voyage.

In the gaps between the trees the red backs of sable antelope were seen above the brown grass. There were hundreds of them, and they turned for a second to stare at the noisy steamer before scampering away. Captains of cargo boats on the river will always stop if you care to shoot for the pot;

but the *Prince Leopold* was a mail-boat, hurrying northwards without delay.

Our chief steward was a man of resource. At every stopping-place he hurried down the gangway, accompanied by a kitchen boy. He bartered face powder for eggs with the wife of a trader. Where there were Englishmen he took a bundle of newspapers, and behold, the kitchen boy staggered on board with a fat buck over his shoulders. Months ago he distributed vegetable seeds at native villages, so that he received all the tomatoes and celery, onions and Brussels sprouts he needed. We enjoyed our meals in the breezy *salle à manger*. The pineapple and mango salads were excellent, and I had not yet learned to hate fried bananas and the Congo chicken.

Our first port of call was Kiabo. Just a hot cluster of huts where cargoes are unloaded when the papyrus grass fills the river and makes navigation impossible. Joseph

Conrad, who once commanded a Congo river steamer, must have had just such a place as Kiabo in mind when he wrote his Outpost of Progress. The sound of our siren brought two pale Belgians out of their grass-roofed shelter. In Conrad's story the climax is reached with that same dramatic sound, but there were no white men alive to answer it.

North of Kiabo we passed the steam pinnace of an officer responsible for the charting of the ever-changing river. It was a narrow forty-foot boat, with a cabin on which the sun struck down pitilessly. There was a tiny deck aft, covered with an awning; but from the intolerable heat there could have been no escape. The officer was a Russian, formerly a captain in the Czar's navy. His wife was with him in that little boat. Once these exiled aristocrats had a mansion in St. Petersburg.



The egg seller, Lualaba River.

Lake Kiabo was crossed next day, a line of massive wooden stakes marking our course. During the rainy season the tributaries of the Lualaba bring floating islands of papyrus down to the lake, and stakes have to be driven into the river bed to check the encroaching masses of grass. But in spite of all human effort, river steamers are sometimes held up for weeks. By fixing an anchor into the papyrus barrier and heaving in vigorously with the winch it is sometimes possible to clear a channel and steam through. When the papyrus cannot be torn open, all trade along the river stops. Each village and trading station offered something new. At one all the little children were paddling canoes as we passed. It was a superbly graceful picture. At another port of call the witch-doctors had been busy. Some outbreak of tropical disease had given them the opportunity of plastering the faces of their patients with white mud, the cure for many ills.



A witch-doctor at Stanleyville.

Our deck-hands seemed to have been recruited from among the most villainous blacks in the Congo. They mingled with the crowd on shore, stole eggs, fruit, anything they could snatch away from the children, and hurried back to the ship with their loot. Often there were pitched battles between our men and the men of the villages. The crew always won, for the security of the steamer was theirs whenever they were outnumbered. They took cover behind the stacks of wood furl on the lower deck and hurled sticks at their enemies. There was nearly always an organised chorus of curses as we steamed away from a village. Take away the risk of disease, and many of the river trading stations would not be unpleasant places in which to make a fortune. They all look very much alike. A thatched house with bamboo walls, packing-cases as tables, canvas chairs, tattered newspapers, and a pet monkey on the veranda. Bananas as long as your



White mud covers the face of this Congo woman as a sign of mourning.

forearm growing in huge bunches outside. Scales for weighing the small brown kernels which are crushed for oil. A store crammed with cloth of every gay pattern likely to appeal to the exacting native taste. Teeming huts of black people. Great dug-out canoes capable of carrying two tons of cargo.

Five days on the river, and soon after breakfast we were at Kabalo, with the train for Kindu waiting. There was a fettered native on the platform at the end of my coach on the train. Two black soldiers with fixed bayonets scowled down on him. He had shot two white men dead, wounded many natives, and escaped into the forests. For weeks there had been a reign of terror around Kindu. So five hundred black soldiers came up the river to hunt the murderer. They found him at last, and here he was, with the five hundred soldiers further down the train in open trucks. A day and a night through the tall trees, and

the train ran alongside another river steamer, the *Prince Charles*, at Kindu.

The soldiers marched on board, found room for themselves marvellously on the lower deck, and started singing “La Brabançonne” in perfect tune. The well-built houses of Kindu vanished behind the palms, and we were steaming away down the river to Ponthierville, two hundred miles away.

I had a moment of sadness at the first port of call, for there my friend the French doctor departed. Seventeen days’ march through the bush, and few white men on the way. “No shops, no cinemas, where I go,” he remarked with a grimace. “And, alas, no pretty ladies. I zink, when I return, I shall be negro. I shall sleep in ze trees.”

Well, his microscope and cases of instruments were stacked on the bank. As the steamer left I saw him standing beside them – a portly man in grey helmet and hot

tweed suit. A brave spirit though, and one of a gallant company who may someday make tropical Africa fit for the white man.

When we arrived at Lokandu, where the troops disembarked, I saw one tall black private hand his pack and rifle to his wife, while he returned to the steamer for less warlike belongings. She dropped the whole lot into the river. This carelessness did not escape the notice of the black sergeant-major, who had the hawk-eyes of his breed. I saw him seize the unfortunate private by the arm, and imagined him to be saying something like this:

“Yus, you got yer bananas acrorst all right, and yer sugar cane, and the fowls wot yer pinched from them poor devils up the river. But here’s yer missus gorn and dropped yer ruddy kit into the water. And if yer trust a rifle to a wumman yer’e a fine blinking soljer and no damned good to this freezing army.”



The market at Kinshasa, Belgian Congo.

Whereupon the private shivered in the hot sunshine, and stood on one leg after the manner of the black man ill at ease.

Waika, the next stopping-place, was an English Protestant mission. White-clad natives crowded down the stone stairway leading to the river. As the *Prince Charles* slid cautiously alongside, an elderly white lady came down the steps to collect her letters. Her husband, the missionary, was away in the bush, finishing part of his life's work, a Kiswaheli dictionary. This old lady was alone at the mission, keeping things going, ruling all these savages by strong and kindly personality. I looked round the fruit gardens with their clipped hedges. The air was sharp with the scent of ripe lemons. A corner of England in Africa. Think what you will of missionary methods; you cannot but admire the courage of these old people, doing their duty as they see it, year after year, in this grim land.

At sundown on the second day we reached Ponthierville, with another journey in another of Africa's crazy railways ahead. There are eighty miles of rapids, the famous Stanley Falls, between Ponthierville and Stanleyville. A tiny train, so roughly finished that it appeared to have been made on the spot, covers the distance in eight hours. Some of the coaches had canvas pouches in which a naval seaman or music-hall gymnast might have slept. Others had narrow cane seats. There was no bedding, and jaded curtains divided male from female in the carelessly inadequate fashion of the country. An eccentric in search of a wash would have been disappointed. Though we crossed the Equator during the night, not even drinking water was provided.

So we clattered away into the darkness, and at six in the morning, unwashed and unrefreshed, reached Stanleyville and the great central water-way of the Congo.



Deck passengers boarding a Congo River steamer.

Stanleyville is not the largest town in the Belgian Congo, but it is by far the most beautiful, and worthy of the explorer. A terrace of palms and mangoes lines the right bank of the river. Behind them are yellow houses and white houses, new brick and cement offices and large stores. The waterfront is the busiest street. Great paddle-wheel steamers come thrashing up the river from Kinshasa on Stanley Pool, a thousand miles away. Lofty passenger-boats with three decks and white-painted cabins – *Michelin*, *Taboya* and the old *Kigoma*, which was once in service on the Mississippi. Smaller and dirtier cargo-boats with strings of barges astern. Hundreds of canoes, some with grass roofs under which black people are born, and live, and die.

Along the water-front there is a double-storied house with a wide balcony looking down on a garden of oil palms. The British Vice-Consul, who knew what the food at

my hotel was like, took me to dinner there. It had been the residence of the King's representatives for many years. As we lounged on the balcony after dinner, smoking and looking at the moths and bats, the Vice-Consul suddenly turned to me and said : "Roger Casement lived in this house."

Somehow I should not care to live in that old house at Stanleyville. I should be afraid that one night a phantom would come swinging up the garden pathway – a lean phantom man followed by two ghostly bulldogs and a shadowy native; Casement as Conrad saw him. "There is a touch of the conquistador in him," wrote Conrad. And conquistadors do not sleep easily...

The *Michelin*, largest stern-wheeler on the Congo, started downstream in the morning. Flags dipped in farewell. Every veranda along the waterfront was crowded with wistful, waving people. The *Michelin* was



Baluba woman, Belgian Congo.

the connecting link with the Belgian mail steamer at Matadi; many lucky ones returning to Antwerp were on board. She was a ship of bananas. On the bridge hung an enormous ripening bunch from which the captain plucked and devoured whenever the intricacies of Congo navigation allowed him a moment. There were bananas a foot long outside the steward's cabin. Every passenger had a bunch. We had raw bananas in the salad, fried bananas at lunch and more plain and ungarnished bananas at dinner. Our passage down the Congo was marked by a trail of banana skins.

During the eight days' voyage the true width of the Congo was never seen. Thousands of islands and sandbanks, with narrow shifting channels between, kept the captain on the bridge from dawn until we tied up late at night. Mile after mile of palm and creeper, vine and mangrove, fern and thick green bush as the *Michelin*



Ivory seller on board a West African liner.

splashed down the river. Just before dinner one night we ran aground. Judging by the shudder and sudden stop we were not merely resting on a sandbank. The *Michelin* was hard and fast. Violent efforts with the paddle wheel merely resulted in the stern swinging away from the shore a little. Our engines raced ahead, astern, ahead, astern. In the bows a searchlight had been placed so that the hard-worked engineer and his natives were seen at the winch in a smother of escaping steam. An anchor with a wire hawser had been laid out in the approved manner, according to all manuals of seamanship. Now our optimists were heaving in the taut wire and hoping that the ship would move before the anchor dragged. They were disappointed. We were still alongside a dark and ghostly island, and swarms of very real mosquitoes were singing round our lights. Canoes, unseen before the stranding, appeared from nowhere and

carried on a feverish trade in fish, manioc, tobacco and eggs with our lower-deck passengers. At midnight the captain gave his worn-out crew a rest until early next morning. The heat of the forest reached out and covered us in humid waves.

An iron boat went over the side at the first crack of dawn. The paddlers took a thick wire hawser on shore and secured it round a huge tree-trunk. The rattle of the winch was heard again. Slowly, very slowly, the wire came in. You cannot heave a lightly built river steamer off the sand in a hurry or she may leave her thin keel plates behind. Gradually the ship moved into the deep water of the channel. The captain ordered his breakfast and began to shave.

On the fifth day we were at Coquilhatville, capital of the Province Equatoriale and half-way house between Stanleyville and Kinshasa. "Coq," as everyone calls this pretty river town, lies on both sides of the Equator. There is one villa at least in

which the dining-room is in the northern hemisphere and the bedroom south of the line.

But it was a dull journey after the life and colour of the narrow upper river. I was not sorry when the river widened into the large island-strewn lake known as Stanley Pool. Here was Kinshasa, fast becoming the most important town in West Africa. Here were the agents of ocean steamship companies. I was within a few days of the end of my journey through the Congo; utterly weary of incessant heat and bush and river; yearning for the smell of salt water and a ship that was outward bound.

Kinshasa might have been one of the great cities of Africa. The geographical misfortune which made the Congo impassable for ocean steamers above Matadi doomed Kinshasa to the position of a river port instead of the outlet for the trade of a country almost as large as

Europe. So there is a narrow-gauge railway climbing over the Crystal Mountains for two hundred and fifty miles instead of an inland water-way. Yet Kinshasa is growing in spite of the handicap. Many towns in West Africa give you the impression that the white man is a passing figure in the history of countries unfit for white people. Kinshasa is a notable exception. With its three-storied steel hotel, its solid banks and business houses, large showrooms and gay cafes, Kinshasa is much more than a hastily built outpost of the tropics.

Sixteen of us in a toy coach on a toy railway – the last railway journey during my five-thousand-mile passage through the Congo. The friendliest train of all. On the tiny engine were two drivers, two firemen and a whistler. Then the little baggage car, the open native truck, a second-class coach, and our own narrow first-class coach. We were lurching along between Kinshasa and Matadi at our top speed of

fifteen miles an hour. In the arm-chair facing me was a young French official who had travelled from the island of Reunion right across Africa to take up a new post at Pointe Noire. The other fourteen were all French, all courteous and helpful to the stranger in their midst, all full of good-humour and the gaiety of their race. Without this merry company the journey would have been tiresome indeed.

There were officers of the French Colonial Infantry, with anchor badges on their khaki uniforms to show that they served the Republic overseas. Civilians with silver buttons on their white tunics, I found, were Administrators of districts somewhere in the dark heart of the French Congo. There was a man with the moustache and pointed beard so valuable to comic artists in England. His girth was immense, and his friends pretended that he was in need of help whenever he moved, and pushed him from seat to seat. There was only one



A Government outpost on the Lualaba River, Belgian Congo.

woman – the mother of a dark eyed, well-behaved little boy who soon revealed himself as a tremendous eater.

These travellers had good reason for their light-hearted laughter. For three years they had collected taxes, drilled black troops, garrisoned little frontier posts as far north as Lake T'chad. They had seen enough sun and palms and sand and they were aching for a glimpse of Paris boulevards. It was early morning when we left Kinshasa. At ten o'clock the mother of the young trencherman cut up pineapples and handed a slice to everyone amid a chorus of "Merci bien." Then the fat man roared, "Toto." A small black boy appeared from the little balcony at the end of the saloon. His master had a box of ice, and invited us all to hand our bottles of warm beer to Toto. During the day Toto was kept busy carrying iced beer and washing plates and glasses.

At eleven o'clock it was time for the "second breakfast." A lieutenant had a cake soaked in brandy. The small boy seized a slice while his parents were not looking. He gulped it down with relish, fiery liquid and all, and resumed his angelic expression. Cold roasted chickens were set out on the little tables, and long, twisted French rolls. At wayside stations we leant out of the windows and bought paw-paws and red oranges with the thin skin of the perfect fruit.

The train crawled up to the cool heights of Thysville in the evening. This is one of the health resorts of the Congo, and I slept without a mosquito net – a relief, indeed, after many nights of suffocation. But at dawn the shrieking of the train whistle awakened me. Coffee, cold sausage and rolls, and we were all aboard again. Stocks of beer and ice had been replenished. We were in a mood to appreciate the superb



Black servants of the State with their wives, belgian Congo.



An Arab shop in Zanzibar.

scenery of the Crystal Mountains. This barrier of tawny stone runs all the way from the Cameroons to Angola, shutting off the coast from the vast central basin of the Congo. The railway follows the old caravan route which Joseph Conrad described in his own masterly way in *Heart of Darkness*, an almost faithful narrative of personal experience. Chinese labourers were imported to build the line up and down these steep gradients. They say that one Chinaman died for every sleeper laid, and one white engineer for every kilometre of metal.

Sometimes the country is like South Africa, rock-crowned kopjes rising out of brown veld and the blue dome of the sky over everything. Then the train gathers speed, and a bush fire is crackling on each side of the track, filling the carriages with smoke. A moment later we are in the tropics again, lush greenery of the forest

darkening the windows, gaudy butterflies over the mangrove swamps.

It was dark when we reached the enormous gorge through which the Congo finally cuts its way to the sea. There were the lights of Matadi, and with a sudden grip at my heart I saw ocean steamers, too. Ocean steamers, with baths and white stewards, soft beds, wide decks where the menacing “ping-ing-ing-zzz” of the mosquito is not heard. For weeks I had endured hotels without comfort, meals without nourishment, air so hot and clammy that it was without life. That row of porthole lights at Matadi was, to me, a promise of luxury, which I was keen to taste after long African travel.

I paid off my black porters and stepped into civilisation.

CHAPTER 15

THE COASTS OF MYSTERY

IN the days of the swashbuckling sea adventurers there was a three hundred mile strip of African coast that lured the hardest and most desperate men. This was the Gold Coast. Portuguese, British, Danes, Dutch and Prussians from Brandenburg – they ran out their muzzle-loading cannon when they saw each other then. Now they all lie quietly at anchor from Dakar to the Congo, rivals only in trade.

Blue, white, yellow and green – those are the colours of “the Coast.” Blue for the West African sea that has borne the keels of slave ships and fighting merchantmen for centuries. White for the surf, the endless roaring surf; and yellow for the sand it beats upon. Green for the jungle stretching away inland, full of its own dark mysteries, to Sahara.

You can still see the white castle built by the Danes as you steam up to Accra. White, with the Union Jack and the green roof of the Governor’s residence above the battlements, and the black rocks and the surf below. Christiansbourg Castle, an impressive relic of a reckless age. Eton-cropped women dance on the time-worn stone where slaves once clanked their chains.

The liner passes on to the jumble of old and new buildings that is Accra, chief port and capital of the Gold Coast Colony. Going ashore on the Gold Coast is still a dangerous affair. There is the “mammy chair” to face, and after that the surf. In these open bays passengers cannot simply walk down a gangway into a boat and be taken quietly to a wharf. The long swell sweeping in from the south makes that impossible. You must swing over the side in the “mammy chair” and drop dizzily



Kroomen, expert boatmen of West Africa, on board a liner.

into the surf boat. It is an ordeal that makes old seamen nervous.

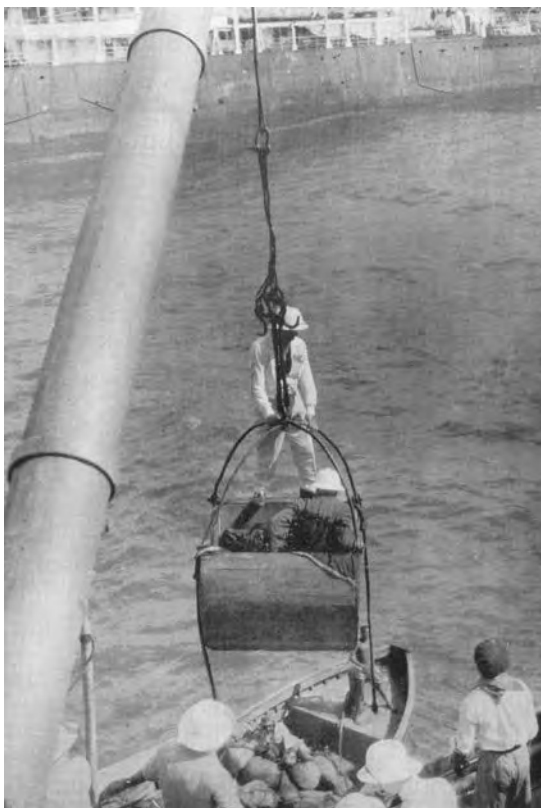
The “mammy chair” is like a swing boat at a fair; just a wooden box with two seats facing each other. It will hold four white people or ten natives; the idea among ships’ officers being that the black races have powers of compression unknown in civilised lands. Fully loaded, the chair rises from the deck with the steam winch clattering merrily. Veritably your life is in the hands of the black man at the winch. You glance up anxiously to see that the steel hooks are not slipping out of the eye in the wire cable that holds you in mid-air. You remember that you have been advised to keep your hands inside the chair, and you grip the seat feverishly.

There is a mad moment as the chair swings out over the vessel’s side. Glancing down, the bravest man might shudder. Far below you the surf-boat lifts, falls and bumps

against the steel plates of the ship. You have a sudden vision of black, upturned faces in the boat, and white eyeballs. The boatmen are supposed to be catching the ropes attached to the chair so that they may guide you to safety. Actually they are taking good care that the heavy chair does not descend on them, wherever else it may fall.

Now the winch man has seized his chance, the chair is dropping towards the water. Half-way down he changes his mind, and the chair stops. As the ship rolls, the chair crashes against the side, giving you a sick feeling of disaster to follow. It is no use telling yourself that accidents never happen. They do. Many a “mammy chair” has been smashed, many people have been flung down between the liner and the heavy surf-boats.

But with a final staggering shock the “mammy chair” drops neatly into the surf-



Going ashore in West Africa – The Mammy Chair.

boat. In a moment the hooks have been released and the paddlers are thrusting their double-ended craft away from the liner's side. You light a cigarette with deep relief. Then you remember that another ordeal has still to be faced. The ordeal of the surf.

Ten red-jerseyed natives are sitting on the gunwale of the boat, urging it forward with paddles shaped like tridents. Each muscular man has one foot in a thong of leather to brace himself for the heavy task of paddling. Rudders are never used. A superb giant of a man stands in the stern with the steering oar. Safe landing or disastrous capsize depend on him.

I sat in a basket-chair opposite a negro shipping clerk, dressed, after the manner of his kind, in white topee and starched white suit. The contrast between this easy living, half-educated person and the straining blacks at the paddles was marked.

“Are these paddlers Kroo-men?” I asked, admiring the taut muscles and deep chests of them as the boat slid forward.

“No, they’re Fula boys from Cape Coast Castle,” he replied contemptuously. I liked the savages much better than the semi-civilised product. As they paddled, they sang the long monotonous song that makes heavy work under the burning African sun so much easier.

“Aa-a-a-a-ah! Wu Bagata!” crooned a paddler in the bows.

“Aa-a-a-a-ah!” they all sang wildly, taking up the rhythm so that the boat leapt faster towards the white line of the surf. Their breath went in sharp, loud hissings.

A shout from the stern, and every man flung down his paddle. Up went the stern as a great curling wave caught us, sped us forward in a headlong rush. I could hear the beating of surf on sand plainly now,

and the noisy welter of spray raining on the boat. The bows touched, the wave passed on. Over the side flashed the ten paddlers. They were up to their necks and dragging at the boat. A few seconds will make all the difference now; another crashing wave will send the boat rolling over and over. But the red-jerseyed men won, the bows were on firm sand. A giant yelled in “Coast pidgin,” and I realised that he was talking to me.

“Massa! You lib for shore massa! Come one-time!”

I was on his back and on the beach before the next overpowering wave arrived. Also I was extremely lucky. Many hundreds of people reach that beach at Accra gasping and squeezing the salt water from their clothes and wondering how much of their baggage the boat’s crew will save from the surf.

Accra beach is a sight for all lovers of tropical romance and African adventure. It was the cocoa season. Sacks of raw cocoa were piled like great barricades in long tin sheds. They say that anything that will grow in the tropics will grow in Gold Coast Colony. These kola nuts, palm kernels, drums of oil, bags of copra, prove the truth of the assertion. The progress of this territory since the war has been astonishing. A railway runs up to Kumassi and down to the coast again to Sekondi. It was strange to watch the heavily shuttered railway coaches moving out on the journey to Kumassi, city of the Ashanti people in the land of the Golden Stool.

No one knows who made the Golden Stool that cost England so many lives. It was the terrible symbol of King Prempeh, and stood beside the fetish tree in Kumassi where hundreds of slaves and captives were beheaded at the whim of a man who rivalled T'Chaka in his blood lust. Then

the British troops sweated up from the coast to dethrone Prempeh and dynamite the fetish tree. The Golden Stool was never found. It is guarded by the peaceable Ashantis to this day. And you can take a train to the city where human sacrifice was a daily event. Nowadays it is the climate that takes toll of the people of Gold Coast Colony. It was painfully hot where I stood on Accra beach. An English public schoolboy, checking cargo alongside the surf-boats and cursing the rain-laden monsoon wind, gave me some idea of life in this insistent heat. There was no pink bloom left in his cheeks. His face was sallow with quinine, lined with illness and worry.

“People in England think that we live easily on the Coast, that the doctors have wiped out all the disease,” he told me wearily, pushing back his heavy helmet. “That idea hurts us out here – it’s all wrong. We are certainly not overpaid, and

our home leave, every two years, is not a luxury – it's death to stay much longer. Some men don't stick it for a year." He told me the facts for the benefit of those who feel the lure of this coast that a novelist once called "Hell's Playground."

The new-comer to a trading firm anywhere on the West African coast usually finds himself at work as a "beach master." He goes down to the beach at six o'clock in the morning and his boy follows him soon afterwards with breakfast. Cold eggs and bacon in a very hot shed. His main duty is to check cargo as the surf-boats come in from the freighters in the roadstead. He must have a quick eye for breakages and shortages – and the ingenuity of the black thief is more Oriental than African.

Dozens of natives arrive during the day with palm kernels, petrol tins and calabashes of palm oil. The beach master must see everything weighed out and

measured. He must supervise the labourers bagging kernels and pouring oil into casks. Always he must have an eye in the back of his head for the incoming surf-boats.

At noon, if he is fortunate, he may stagger up to the mess for lunch; and, with equally good luck, he may be able to rest for an hour or two. But when the cocoa season is on, when there are many ships in the bay, he may not get to the mess at all. A sandwich in the shed, which has by now become intolerably hot, will have to satisfy him. Leisurely "chop" during the day is a rare experience for the "first-timer" in West Africa.

Work goes on unceasingly until six in the evening – sometimes later. The beach master's head begins to ache, his eyes are tired and dazzled in the blinding glare of the sun. No tennis at sundown for him. Just time for a hasty shower before dinner. Trading firms recognise no public

holidays, and Sunday is often the most feverishly busy day of the week. So much vital work has to be done that the conscientious man dare not even go down with malaria until the fever forces him down.

In return for this unpleasant life, the young man learning to be a West Coast trader may expect a salary of £25 a month, possibly a little more. At the end of two years he will receive four months' leave in England on half-pay. If he is invalided home before his contract has expired, he is almost certain to lose his job. If he works hard for two years, he may be lucky enough to secure an eighteen months' contract for the next spell of duty, and a higher salary. A well-educated young man, ambitious and with the essential physical endurance, will be making more at the end of five years on the Coast than he would receive after twenty years in England. Or he may still be selling cotton print to hot

and odorous black humanity behind the counter in the store.

A career in West Africa is a gamble. You back your character and your body against the most insidious climate in the world. The agents and supervisors, with their £1,000 a year salaries, and their trips to England every nine or twelve months, are the men who have won. The losers, some of them, are dragging themselves along slum pavements in English towns, their drink-sodden bodies in torment and their throats aching for whisky. I doubt whether any land in the world breaks men more surely and completely than "the Coast."

2

Pink tints of dawn brightened into the radiance of a new day as I watched the purple mountains of Sierra Leone lifting from an emerald sea. While the steamer's propellers drummed through calm waters

the peaks were clipped and a maze of palms stood out against the eastern sky.

Run your finger down the coast of Africa from Cape Verde and you reach a red-painted stretch of country about the size of Scotland, a place that retains the romantic sounding name given by old Spanish sea-adventurers who fared south with their slave ships so many years ago. Sierra Leone – Lion Mountain! When that purple mass rises from the quivering horizon you see the likeness. It is the one civilised outpost of a grim and savage land, where Death stands chuckling as the black boy hands you the whisky bottle; where the mosquitoes hang in a silver, noisy cloud about the lamps at night, and the cry of a distant leopard comes shrill across the jungle.

The steamer closes in with the shore and passes the slim white finger of a lighthouse; passes a wreck, with the surf

creaming along the rusty sides; red-roofed houses; tin sheds on the water-front, and crazy native houses built up on piles. Here, then, is Freetown – the white man's grave they used to call it – sweltering on the mountain slopes that back the shore. To approach it from the sea is beautiful; to live there – we must let the lean, sun-tanned men speak of that.

Canoes appear, black giants paddling with tireless arms in the race to be first alongside. Narrow-gutted canoes, cunningly shaped from single tree-trunks, and loaded far below the danger-line with tropic fruit and queer leather covered bottles, monkeys and parrots, mats and brightly patterned baskets. They shoot quickly into the vision, these salesmen of the jungle, rolling their white eyeballs; screaming to each other in the monkey language, picking up our jettison – broken biscuits and the like – and storing it carefully in their frail canoes.



Negro women at Sierra Leone.

A tug pants out to us. There is a black man on the bridge, smartly dressed in ludicrous Victorian fashion and wearing a high white collar. He is in command of the tug, and his appearance conveys to the new-comer an idea of the queer state of affairs ashore.

Freetown is a place of many sects, with the American influence strongly impressed. Black deans in knee-breeches – the very negroes who occasionally preach to wondering congregations in English country churches – walk solemnly among their people; and muscular curates, too, wearing horn-rimmed spectacles, and talking earnestly at corners of the tree-lined streets. These grown-up children of freed slaves have even sought to imitate the English public school system. You see shining black faces beneath straw hats with school ribbons, and little black bodies thrust uncomfortably into blazers and white trousers. Drove of these

chattering children with cricket-bats stroll through the town each day, led by elegant negro masters. To a South African like myself, to all who have learned the ways of black races, they form an astounding picture. In the courts, barristers and even judges are keen-brained natives; and it is strange to hear Latin phrases and legal jargon from their thick red lips.

I turn for relief to Freetown itself, a jumble of shops once you close your eyes to the ubiquitous missions. Love of barter is strong among African peoples; it is the only work many of them will perform. Even the pot-bellied, naked children hawk baskets of fruit, and a boy of six will try to sell you a pair of green squirrels as you walk off the landing stage. Trade goods from Birmingham and Germany litter every pavement, with negro “mammies,” splendidly over-dressed, squatting in the shade close by their stalls.

A strange array of cheap junk is seen in these street markets – cotton goods and beads, boots, hats and caps, soap and perfumery. Every day bales and cases swing up from the lighters to the old wooden jetty, and from the jetty to Freetown, and from Freetown to the unknown jungle. And from the forest depths of the hinterland come palm kernels and kola nuts, palm oil and ginger, all by the most primitive transport, to the ever-hungry cargo boats.

In a town of much barter there must be strange shops. I recall one in which the attendants were all very old men with turbans round their wrinkled foreheads. A shop where leopard skins lay piled on a mud floor, and the old men raised bony claws in frantic entreaty as I examined their goods; where a ju-ju mask, cast off by some witch-doctor, lolled in a corner so naturally that the twisted face might have belonged to an evil resident of the place.

Wonderful cloths, with indelible dyes that are still kept as tribal secrets, hung in wide bands of brown and yellow on the walls. And much smooth, grey pottery.

The Indian shops – there are only two of these far-flung outposts of the East in all Freetown – are stocked with the curios of the desert, the trinkets of Egypt, and carpets that might have been loaded on camels at the gates of Samarkand. Here are glittering brass trays, silks and ivory – Oriental suggestions in a place that is pure Africa. For the cruder African things we must go to the native market, a low-roofed, acrid-smelling building on the seafront where the inevitable negro “mammies” chaffer over their woven baskets and reed mats.

Creoles, they call the English-speaking negroes of Freetown, giving the word quite a different meaning from its usage in other parts of the world. And the Creoles twist

English, too, as you realise when the notice-board outside the Cosmopolitan Bar meets your astonished gaze; for this reeking shanty, where the only drink is vile palm toddy, is labelled "a home from home." More truthful, perhaps, is the claim of Alimamy Bungie, the famous "sympathetic undertaker." Alimamy Bungie was recovering from the celebration of his fifty-third birthday during my visit; and a local newspaper published his photograph, with this letter-press beneath: "He preferred presents of good chop and grog than any other gifts."

Other negro traders are more refined than the honest Alimamy; they placard their shops with reminders that they have "graduated in the U.S.A.," and urge the native population to "support a fellow African." You hear the same cry from mission platforms, and it barely conceals a hatred of all Europeans; a vicious spirit of discontent born of the impotency to

reach real European standards. It is the more bitter because every native recognises in his heart the colour barrier.

Wilberforce Hall! There is history in a name; and there the unhappy second and third generations, victims of slavery, voice their hopeless aims today. Two governments are possible in West Africa. One is by the law of the white ruler; the other by savage rites which have come down through the centuries, flourishing even now in the hinterland unchecked. But for the educated negro there is no chance of supreme power; he would be kicked into the sea by his "fellow Africans" of the jungle tomorrow if the white man left – and he knows it!

Little the problems of statesmanship trouble Krootown Road, the main vein of the Creole quarter. What a garish medley of cotton print dresses around the benzene lamps at night, and how pungent the dried

fish smell. Here are fantastic houses; ramshackle, impossible dwellings, with perilously overhanging balconies, bright roofs of red and green, and luxuriant gardens. In subtle manner these negro homes produce an illusion; they seem to have grown up with the jungle that riots on all sides – and that in spite of their patches of tin and corrugated iron and cracked-glass windows. Dilapidated they may be, but the native, even the topee-wearing monstrosity, usually contrives to build a shack which is essentially part of its tropical surroundings. The shabbiest straw hut is precisely what one would expect to find in such a place as the Krootown Road; so natural that one senses in them an atmosphere of dark mystery which rightly belongs to the inland forests, and yet is part of this city by the sea; this “Liverpool of West Africa” which is guided from Downing Street.

Since brains are needed to win the riches of the tropics, young white men sweat their lives away among the dangers of the hinterland. One night I met the white traders. In West Africa, a new-comer’s white face is his passport. The British community is so small that a traveller is sure of welcome and an audience of hungry-eyed and home-sick exiles. I was standing for a moment in the heavy, scented air of night when a man in white drill came across the dusty street and spoke. “My name is Brown,” he said, and mentioned the name of a trading company that is famous from Bathurst to the Congo. “Come up to my rooms and have a drink. Some of the fellows are there, and you may be able to tell us how things are going in England.”

So in the high apartment above the store I met other drill clad men; and while soft moonlight peered through the jalousies and the monotonous rumble of native

voices drifted up from the Krootown Road, they talked. Ice tinkled in the whisky glasses. It appeared that they did not want to hear very much about Leicester Square after all; their own daily round was the most intensely interesting thing in life. They were gripped by the fascination of trade. I can see them now, those tense, seamed faces, half in shadow, around the oil-lamp; and even as they spoke the million and a half savages of the hinterland were beating their drums and selling human flesh in open market. Of such things the traders spoke.

They spoke of age-old tongues and codes which no white man may learn; of secret languages peculiar to each type of craftsmen; and of the unwritten native jungle law, which forbids the things which are daily terrors to be named aloud. There was a little hushed conversation about the vice and black magic rites – and other things which the white man cannot

explain. Personal experience crept into the talk, the weird story of a trader who found himself growing weaker and weaker among a tribe which had willed him to die.

There was the copra-buyer's story of a woman sacrificed, her tortured scream, a fiendish bait to make him leave his hut one night; and he told of the spear that streaked over his head as he doubled up, revolver in hand, to pass through the narrow doorway. But these commercial adventurers cared little for spears. In West Africa it is the unseen things which count. Even the climate seems to be in league with the witch-doctors; for all along "the Coast" white men suffer from wounds which do not heal.

I met one of the women exiles of Sierra Leone. A mere married girl, she was, but the colour had left her cheeks during six months in the steamy tropics. Her

bungalow home was at Hill Station, where the air is a little cooler. From the green mountain heights she could see the yellow funnels of the Elder Dempster liners come and go each week. As we chatted a vulture, scraggy-necked and revolting, swung down from the sky to alight with a scratching of talons on a tin roof close by us. The girl shuddered, and told me of her longing to see the rooks in the elms again, to hear the bells of the village church in England. One of her sad, strangely wise remarks lingers in my memory. "Africa is grotesque," she said. "Everything is twice the size it ought to be, or else incredibly small; and there is nothing permanent except the ghastly spirit of the place." She meant the exotic Africa of the tropics, of course. And indeed the only Africa she knew uses beauty as a lure, with the most fatal poison never far from the most gorgeous colour.

"Chop" is the universal name of all food in West Africa from the birthday orgy of Alimamy Bungie to a six-course European dinner. And George's Hotel is the best place for "chop" in Freetown, a restaurant which is quite beyond advertisement. Ships' pursers, a cunning breed of gourmets, tell me there is no other seaport town along hundreds of miles of West African littoral where such good food is to be obtained. George, who is a Swiss, was prompted by the infallible business acumen of his race to migrate from Soho to Sierra Leone. He has grown rich, and because he had provided Freetown with an astounding contrast, I think he deserves his success.

Across the threshold of his hotel you step from the jumble of life that is Africa into the typical atmosphere of Soho; and though this swift transition is shaken by the fact that the soft-footed waiters are not Swiss, but negroes, the fantasy is not

destroyed. George, a fat, beaming fellow, heightens the contrast. He advances as you enter, to show you to a little table in the corner. You feel that something unusual is about to take place in the kitchen purely for your benefit. But do not look out of the window, or Africa will come throbbing back to the senses.

Iced soup !You never guessed it until the spoon touched your mouth. Then you realise that on this damp tropical night no other soup would suffice. Fried barracuda next, speared by a native in the bay; with Sauce Tartar it forms delicious comparison with the soft fish from the ship's refrigerator. Then a grill, with potatoes in such slender chips that you wonder at the crispness of them. Meanwhile George has poured out the wine – it came unscathed through the bombardment of Verdun. There follows a fruit salad in which it is possible to trace the fibrous mango, the bright yellow lime,

smooth strips of pineapple, and bananas. That was good. The diner is now in a mood to regard Freetown with a friendly stare. Coffee, with the inevitable condensed milk disguised by a miracle, gives the necessary jolt. The search for excitement and interest may be renewed. George knows the precise moment. "A native chief of my acquaintance has arranged a dance for tonight," he murmurs. "If you gentlemen would care to attend..."

Already the drums of Africa were sending their vibrating notes through heavy air. We took our helmets and followed the guide along mango-bordered lanes until a bamboo fence jutted out of the darkness, with the black loom of huts beyond. The guide whistled, and a little gate swung open. Here the drum-voices boomed loud in their thunderous cycle of primitive notes. Ebony palm trees formed the wings of this African theatre, with the stars hot

night sky as backcloth. The Mendi chief came forward, and we touched hands after the custom of the country. Torches lit the scene, sometimes vividly, often flickering down to pin-points of yellow. Huddled together in a weird; half-seen mass between the huts, the dancers waited for their chief's command. And still the drums throbbed, so that the sticks seemed to kiss the taut skin a thousand times each minute.

Ghost-shapes among the huts began to move. From the blackness came six small girls, their shining bodies smeared with white paint. Wide-eyed they stood in the semi-gloom swaying to the music, like frightened, hesitating little animals. More fiercely thudded the drums, and now a dozen *calabash* pianos, struck with knobs of rubber, joined the tumult. Then the six frightened little animals awoke into six little devils. How they spun and whirled and flung themselves into the drama of

the dance! How perfect their balance as they flashed before the torches! They had answered the call of the drums, and now they lived the fantastic melody. The drums and *calabashes* sang on, died, sobbed and laughed. The very soul of Africa danced under the palms that night.

With dramatic suddenness the beating ceased. Again there stood six wide-eyed little girls, not in the least breathless, perhaps a little dazed. It was all magic, making the blood tingle.

At this point there enters the story – with a bellow of “O! Boy! Bring whisky!” – one whom I shall call Captain Jones. On the shoulder-strap of his khaki tunic are the metal letters that stand for “Sierra Leone Police.” Sundown in Freetown, and I had been glad to leave the blazing streets for the cool building where every wanderer gets a cordial handshake – the Garrison Club. My friend Jones fitted the

surroundings, typically West African. Standing on the wide veranda you look out over umbrella trees and red flowers, across a maze of roofs and huts, to palm-dotted coves and green hills, and yellow sand merging into the blue waters of the bay. Such things make no appeal to Jones. Not so long ago he was a rosy-faced youth, laughing on the playing-fields of an English public school. Life was a joke in those days, and even Sierra Leone was “not such a bad show “when he arrived for the first time. I saw him as he is today, pallid beneath the bronze, lines of something more than care under the eyes, head close-cropped, fingers trembling as he knocks the ash from his cigarette. A lanky figure in khaki, stretched out in a long cane chair, gazing with half-closed eyes through the open doors to the tropical riot of flowers in the garden, the barrack square beyond, and a lazy native squatting under a tree. And he

talked, this square-jawed police officer. His yarns linger. Half-gloom and sluggish water up a West African creek, and untamed men slinking along the banks, watching the little white police-launch, fingering their spears...

The Colonial Office blue-books say little about Ju-Ju, which is West African witchcraft, a real and terrible science. Jones, who knows a great deal more than the Colonial Office, has studied Ju-Ju. And as night fell he began his tale, pointing across the bay to the winking lights of Bullom, a native village that sprawls along the water’s edge. It is about ten miles from Government House, and in Bullom there was a leopard society, doing its uncanny work by night, and leaving the result for Captain Jones and his men to find in the clear light of day. West African negroes are people of few ideas; and the traditions of their tribe, centuries old, are just as real in their minds as the

sea and the jungle. Some of these traditions are cruel blood rites, perpetuated by the leopard societies. Men become leopards. The soul of a man goes out, and his body is no longer a human body; and on the corpses of their victims Captain Jones has seen the teeth marks... of leopards.

3

The ebony arm of Africa stretches across half the world. It throws a long shadow. Something drops over you darkly in cities far from the beat of tom-toms and the song of the paddlers on tropical rivers. There is Africa, more insistent than a memory of the East.

When I watched the last mangrove swamp of West Africa vanishing astern of a liner homeward bound, I thought that I had seen the end of black humanity for a time. But in Paris they were applauding a

mulatto actress at the Folies. In London a black man held out his tin mug as he tapped his way along the wet pavement. And in New York I found the largest negro city in the world. Harlem, they call it; though there is another and more expressive name – “Nigger Heaven.” Among the quarter of a million blacks and golden browns, yellows, and almost whites in this section of New York, all the negro types of the world are represented. South America has sent Spanish and Portuguese-speaking negroes. Many know nothing but French. Thousands came from the British West Indies. There is a mysterious dark-skinned Abyssinian sect who speak Hebrew among themselves and worship in a tiny synagogue.

Harlem, however, draws an overwhelming number of its teeming population from below the Mason-Dixon line; from those Southern States of jazz and cotton fame where the Ku-Klux-Klan and Jim Crow

ordinances make life unhappy for the coloured man. The soft accents of Virginia and Georgia are heard in every corner of New York's "black belt."

The negro rejoices in the isolation of Harlem. For all the interference Harlem receives from the rest of cosmopolitan New York, it might be on St. Helena. There was a time when negroes lived "down town," in streets where stand the mansions of millionaires today. Wave after wave of European immigrants drove the black people northwards. Harlem, which had been in turn Dutch, Irish, German and Jewish, was swamped by the black invaders. The negroes had learned a lesson. They saved miraculously and bought whole blocks of tenements in Harlem. Now they are secure against any attack.

Surrounded by whites, they have their own black policemen, their own banks,

shops and amusements; doctors and dentists and lawyers, too. But, by the same queer reasoning which sometimes sends white people to black doctors, the negroes of Harlem often prefer to consult a white man rather than one of their own colour. And that is despair and tragedy for the educated negro who has glimpsed in Harlem a new world and a heaven within his grasp.

Take a walk in Harlem under the hot September sun. This is no walled city. No barricade nor barbed-wire compound fence shuts off black from white. As you saunter down Seventh Avenue there is no telling where white New York ends and Harlem begins. Shops, buildings, signs – all are of the same type. But step across just one street and you are instantly in the negro city. A moment ago every face was white; now the few white faces that you see are subtly and strangely different. White faces with the flat noses and

sloping foreheads of the negro. Jet-black faces. Copper faces. Faces with sharply-cut Nordic features, yet covered darkly. Ghastly pink albino faces. Purple-powdered faces of mulatto women. Pink and rouge faces of light-coloured girls. Every negro face that I had seen in Africa was there, and many that were new. Blonde negroes with blue eyes, revealed only by their finger-nails. Sleek-haired girls with rose-red cheeks and little beyond their swinging, easy walk to show that they, too, were of Harlem. Many of them could “cross the line,” as they call it, and become white without fear of detection. But they love their Harlem, where the slightest tinge of African blood seems to bind all shades into a solid and contented tribe.

Observe the shops of Harlem. In this fashion-store the French dolls among the silks have been moulded with negroid faces and painted black to please the

customers. The book shop next door displays religious books in which black saints and angels are shown. Brilliant posters outside the theatre down the street reveal a line of coloured chorus girls in the “Nightingales” revue. There are beauty shops, with dainty, white-clad coloured assistants-flourishing in the daily business of pretending to make dark people look lighter than they really are. A negress in Harlem made a fortune by placing on the market a liquid which straightens the woolly hair of the African-but it must be used every day, or the curls will come back.

In West Africa I have seen notices in the windows of black traders’ stores appealing for the support of “fellow Africans.” That is not the way of Harlem. Almost every shop employs black assistants, clerks and typists. There is nothing by which you can distinguish the business owned by the white man from that of the

negro. Outwardly, at least, the people of Harlem are not bizarre in their tastes. They eat American food – which is all the world's food served on cleaner plates at higher prices. They wear American clothes with the characteristic negro love of overdressing. They play American games. They share in the astounding prosperity of America, living much more comfortably than many white communities in other countries.

Each morning the subways are crammed with negroes bound for the wharves and giant hotels and skyscrapers “down town.” As dock workers, elevator operators, in factories and in laundries, they toil all day. At night, Harlem sends out ten thousand black musicians to amuse white New York. You might form the opinion that these energetic negroes were really Americans, that the last link between them and Africa had been snapped. To reach below the surface, to see how jungle

instinct survives, you must visit Harlem by night. In the cabarets you will see the real, unchanged negro.

“Small's Paradise” does not lurk behind barred doors and secret signs. The entrance is marked with blazing electrics. It was midnight, and “Small's” was beckoning to the exotic crowd that fills the place until dawn every day.

My companion, a South African who had lived in New York for several years, passed down the crooked stairs. In the curtained hall-way we came under the scrutiny of a painted albino woman. “Table for two – we just want to see your show,” explained my friend; and we passed into the flickering coloured lights of the “Paradise.” The low roofed hall throbbed with the rhythm of a superb jazz orchestra. Brass rails surrounded the dancing floor. Tables and people were in a merciful semi-gloom. The lights at “Small's” were never

brilliant for long. Sometimes they shone green, like the dim radiance of the African forest. Or red, like the fire when the natives are driving game on distant hills. Or intense yellow, concentrated on a palpitating dancer, as the sun falls on the frenzied n'gomas of Africa.

"The menu, sah!" Our waiter held out the pink card which informed us that ginger ale cost a dollar a bottle. Dubious entertainment is usually expensive.

"Anything stronger – beer or wine?" I asked.

"Very sorry, sah! We don't carry that stuff anymore. We like to please our patrons, but the police –"

Other patrons were carrying it. They arrived with bulging pockets and set out their bottles of gin and rye whisky openly. But we had to order ginger ale. "Wise guys come here with something on the

hip," advised the waiter. Then the whirlpool of melody broke again, and we turned to see the dancers.

They were like the phantom people of a nightmare. At first the scene was blurred, red frocks, golden frocks, diamond garters, all blurred in the spotlights. It all came sharp at last – each couple swaying and stamping to the voluptuous saxophones and drums. Every shade of colour in the arms of every other shade.

"Cigarettes, cigars, chewing-gum, sah!" The girl passed on with her tray. Many little paper packets were cautiously opened in "Small's" that night. Not chewing-gum, though. Snow. There is a mixture for you – gin and cocaine. It explained much of what we saw later.

One o'clock, dancers trailing off the floor, and all set for the "Paradise" show. Slap and clatter of clog dancers. Straw hats, striped trousers. New vibrating life in the

orchestra. Coloured dancing girls high stepping. Brown skins a ghostly violet under the arc lamps. A gorilla man, arms swinging below his knees, twisting and shivering like an epileptic medicine man in Central Africa.

“Do-do-do-do-o-o-o” urged the saxophones. “Tap tap-tra-a-a-ap!” came the drum notes. Sounds that you might hear along a lonely Congo backwater and not be certain whether men or animals were gathered in the blackness of the trees.

Before the show there had been little restraint; now there was none. Quarts of gin were gulped hastily. The jazz band awoke in a wild roar. Men dragged women on the dancing floor. Faces swam past the tables – faces that were different again from the Harlem faces I had seen in the daylight. A Chinaman with his mask off, staring lasciviously into the eyes of an Eton-cropped black woman. A tall and

powerful negro clasping a girl of pure European blood. She called him “Kid,” and my friend looked away, sickened. Sallow, tired young men with immovable grins, coloured girls hugged close to them. A negro in evening dress and a negress sheathed in green.

Some of Harlem’s cabarets have gone white, “Small’s” is sometimes half white, but it is still essentially the cabaret of the negro. And it is not all depravity. Genius has blossomed in places like “Small’s” – famous players like Layton and Johnstone and Florence Mills have sung there before Europe knew them; sung and crooned those sad spirituals that were born in slavery.

Supper was being served when a girl stepped on to the floor to sing – a tall, slim, coloured girl. The low hall seemed to rock with the applause that greeted her. Then she sang :

“woke up this mawnin’
The day was dawnin’
And I was sad and blue, so blue, Lord –
Didn’ have nobody
To tell my troubles to –”

As we listened we forgot our food. One day London and Paris will hear that girl. I left when the song was over, and sailed for South Africa a few days afterwards. Out in the wide spaces of the lonely Atlantic I sometimes heard that voice again, so wistful and sad that it might have contained all the sorrows of the negro race.

CHAPTER 16

JUNGLE COPPER

If you have any feeling for the atmosphere of a transcontinental train you will find it when the long brown “Rhodesia Express” hauls out of Cape Town every Monday morning on the two thousand miles run to the Congo.

This man with the safari-stained sun-helmet, framed in a second-class window, walked up to Broken Hill when Bulawayo was railhead. One coach away, a woman with a Paris hat, fresh from the mail-boat, is going to make a playground of the Victoria Falls. Dark-bearded Belgians gaze moodily at the last of Table Mountain. They are lovers of civilised places, and for them the Congo holds little fascination. A Portuguese, more deeply rooted in Africa, unfolds his Noticias and settles down to read and roll cigarettes until he comes to sandy Beira.

There are other travellers of a different type: young men in khaki shorts, sturdy, cheerful, with the names of Nkana, Roan, Antelope or Mufulira on their baggage. These are picked men, the builders of the Copper Belt in Northern Rhodesia. They are bound for a scene of mining enterprise on a grand scale – work such as Africa has not seen since the discovery of the Rand.

North steams the “Rhodesia Express,” past the blue ground and the old wonder of Kimberley, taking Bechuanaland in its stride during the night, curving, whistling, clattering through the green bush to Bulawayo. And now the white vision of the Falls in the darkness is a memory. The dining-car has lost its smart company of tourists. The men of the lonely places stare a little wistfully into their glasses and remember their quinine. Abruptly the talk turns to the life they know – that tropical Rhodesia which has not changed much, outside the great mining centres, since

the first white men penetrated this wilderness of hidden wealth. This is stirring talk. It carries the ring of experience.

“Tsetse? I never worry about tsetse. Carry a lump of raw meat on your back and let them bite that.”

In this country insects are more dangerous than wild beasts; men laugh at lions and curse the mosquito.

“Yes, I remember the fellow – saw his book, with a picture of a lion eating out of his hand. A dead lion, of course...”

“Seven lions in Broken Hill township – chap who shot them dragged them into his yard and charged a shilling to see them.”

Hunting is one of the great topics over the sun downers on this train. There are still huge areas in Northern Rhodesia where close seasons are unknown, and

even the elephant hunter may be sure of his tusks. So I hear them talking eagerly through the cigarette haze.

“I know a place in the Bangweolo swamps where there is an island of lions. They go in there in the dry season and get cut off.”

“Sixty carriers we had – they ate that hippo where it lay. Wonderful what meat-hungry natives will do.”

“The tea-room at Ndola was full up after the bioscope, when the leopard dashed in. A man with a six-shooter killed it.”

“I felt that something was following me so I set fire to the grass. They found the spoor in the morning. Lion all right. Must have been trailing me for miles.”

“Don’t let them move you if you go down with blackwater on safari. Tell the boys to build a hut round you. Drink barley water, or rice water. The pioneers

believed in gin, but barley water saved me.”

“The pioneers had an alcoholic remedy for everything.” Sometimes you meet men who took a hand in making railway construction records on this track to the north – the line that now runs without a break to Port Francqui on the Kasai, more than three thousand miles from Cape Town.

“One of Pauling’s jobs,” you hear them say. “Sleepers, rails, engines, thousands of tons of material came over the Zambezi gorge by cable-way – the bridge was not built then. We were going all out, never a day long enough. Contract time-limit was a mile a day. One day we laid five and three-quarter miles of permanent way – it’s never been beaten anywhere.”

Beside the track, in little clearings marked out and protected by upright sleepers, are the graves of men who died while others

carried the railway on towards the Congo frontier.

The urge that drove the line so far to the north beyond the Victoria Falls was mining. Without that, travellers would still be toiling through the bush of Northern Rhodesia with long columns of carriers. This inaccessible country may hold other riches, but mining dominates all else. The Broken Hill mine brought the railway there in 1906, and the vast Katanga copper mines led the steel track on to Elisabethville a few years later.

Copper is a magic word indeed up and down this single railway track. Copper moved the capital of Northern Rhodesia from Livingstone to Lusaka. Three days after leaving Cape Town we see this new capital; a shabby settlement on one side of the line, solid Government buildings and offices on the other. Lusaka gives some relief from the eternal bush country.

Elsewhere the colonists tell you they feel shut in and crave for a view. Here there is a break in the solid green wall. Lusaka is healthy, too, with an altitude of four thousand feet; and the devastating rainfall of the north, sixty inches a year, is halved in these parts. Many Dutch-speaking South Africans have settled in the Lusaka highlands. Dairy cows are not troubled by the tsetse, and fine crops of wheat and maize are grown.

So the struggles, vicissitudes and victories of the copper mines are watched by people far from the scene, yet whose lives are bound up intimately with the fortunes of the Copper Belt.

The Copper Belt! That is the greatest topic of all on board the north express when Lusaka has dropped behind. Mining engineers and geologists talk of synclines and malachite. Ordinary miners tell you with fewer technicalities but the same faith

that “the stuff is there.” Once despised or doubted, the copper deposits of the Rhodesia Congo border are now declared by leading financiers and famous mining experts to be the largest in the world. The future of the Copper Belt grows bright as the train takes us noisily over the Kafue River and through the endless bush.

“There will be cities up here – 100,000 white people in the Belt,” says one. “Before the copper discoveries there was no population at all. Look at it now! Why, they will be working that copper in a hundred years’ time.”

“Roan and Nkana will be the largest copper mines in the world,” declares another.

“We’ll soon be home,” they are saying a little later, when the scattered houses of Ndola emerge in the dusk. I thought they were joking. Not until I had seen the cool and beautiful homes and gardens of the

mine towns did I realise that the Copper Belt was no longer a place of exile.

At Ndola, the rear lights of the Congo train disappear into the forest, leaving me south of the frontier to see a new and solid achievement which did not exist when last I came this way.

I have reached the “capital” and business centre of the Copper Belt. Ndola – they call it un-Dola-is destined, according to some authorities, to become the largest city between Johannesburg and Cairo. The man who paces the platform with me has no doubt about this, for he saw Ndola first as a collection of trading shacks and a *boma* – a Government post. It was a Customs station, and a halt before the long trek through the “fly belts” of remote north-eastern Rhodesia to Abercorn.

Years passed while Ndola remained merely a place in the railway time-table. In 1924, Ndola’s hopes were raised by talk of

the coming development of copper; but it was still a little village of ten corrugated iron shacks. Today there are more than five hundred white people and thousands of natives in Ndola. The buildings are valued at half a million sterling. Engineering firms have their offices there, and the mines place as many orders as possible with these local representatives. Ndola is no longer a wayside station – it is the junction for Roan Antelope in one direction, Nkana and Mufulira in the other. You have only to look at a modern directory to see that Ndola – a bad place for lions a few years ago – has all the makings of a modern city.

Well, the train for Nkana, forty-one miles away, is ready, and the dining-car is still there. As we sit over our coffee after dinner an old hand tells me that it was only by a stroke of colossal good fortune that these Northern Rhodesia mines should have been developed at all. “In the Congo,” he points out, “only a few miles

away across the border, there was rich ore on the surface. Here the surface deposits were discouraging – they looked, quite reasonably, for something similar to the Congo indications, and for some time the results were discouraging. The lone prospector never had a chance in this country. It was organised exploration work on the largest scale the world has ever known that proved the value of these mines.”

At the next table two Americans – masters of the art of working low-grade copper – are discussing the great problem of the demand for their product.

“For thirty years it has been said that every new mine would spoil the market. All false prophecies. Give us a prosperous world, and by 1940 there will be a demand for 5,000,000 tons of copper a year...”

“A Copper Eldorado ... cities up here.”

The red glare of the smelters and pulsing of heavy machinery announce Nkana in the night. After days in the train I am glad to follow the hotel porter on foot through the bush, along narrow paths to the hotel.

This is the first of many surprises in the Copper Belt. I had been told there was a good hotel; but I did not expect this great two-storied building standing at the very edge of the tropical forest. As I passed the lounge, I caught a glimpse of people in deep, modern chairs, listening to the Paris radio. Then I entered a large room, built for the tropics, with glass-topped furniture, running water, electric reading lamps, a bed with a mosquito net.

It does not seem such a long way from Cape Town now. In these surroundings I am prepared to enjoy my stay in a land which, only a few years ago was a sinister corner of, Africa, where a white man walked in danger of his life.

“This will never be a white man’s country until the white man can grow a black skin to keep out the sun,” declared a visitor to the copper mines of Northern Rhodesia some years ago.

Without any such startling change of colour, however, the white man in the Copper Belt today has won a great victory over a climate once regarded as deadly. The old saying – “if a man has a hidden weakness Africa will find it out” – remains true. But the men of the Copper Belt are picked men. They live there healthy and happily, most of them, year after year.

Nowhere else in tropical Africa have I seen such comfort, even luxury, as I found everywhere along the Copper Belt. There are still difficult problems to be faced; it remains to be seen whether white families will flourish for long within nine hundred miles of the Equator. The Copper Belt is still a bad place for invalids. The nervous

person who sees madness in every chance exposure to the sun, and death in every insect bite, is better out of it. We will talk to the doctors about such things a little later. Come into the homes of Nkana – the largest mine settlement – and see how these far-away people live.

“Thank Heaven the Americans planned these houses,” one woman said to me. And indeed the high American standard of living and ideals have made a vast difference to the cosmopolitan inhabitants of Nkana. Every house has a garden – wonderful some of them are, with their carnations and roses and green lawns that grow so well. Beds of strawberries, tomatoes, green peas and other vegetables help to keep down the cost of living. Mango trees grow and bear fruit almost as quickly as the tree in the celebrated Eastern illusion. You can select a pawpaw for breakfast from your own garden.

All houses are netted against the chief enemy, the mosquito. The fine gauze gives such good protection that few people in Nkana sleep under mosquito nets. The veranda is probably used more than any other room. I have pleasant memories of those cool verandas, shaded with green blinds, decorated with spears and skins and carved wooden masks; the white-clad native boy with the tray of drinks and “small chop” at sundown time; the friendly, cheerful faces, not at all like other exiles in less remote corners of Africa.

Every house has hot and cold running water and a flush drainage system. Ice is sent to the door every day by the mine refrigerating plant; the charge for a large block is 3d. Forty units of electricity a month are supplied free. A native cook-boy is well paid at £1 a month, with 4s. 6d. for his food. Each house has a separate kya in the back garden for the

servant. Another servant may be employed as garden-boy at 10s. a month. There is no servant problem in the Copper Belt-the only difficulty lies in teaching raw savages to adapt themselves to the white man’s ways. Some, I know, have learnt their work astonishingly well; I saw black butlers, waiters and wine stewards who would have made efficient servants in any large hotel.

So everyone, from the heads of departments in their large-gabled mansions to the youngest bachelors in circular Kayter huts, enjoys the pleasures of city homes at a cost that might well make people in South Africa envy them. At the moment there is a housing shortage at Nkana, the hotel and the boarding-houses are full.

The houses are so attractive that many of the young men want to be married – there are scores on the waiting list. It is not difficult to visualise Nkana as a city in the



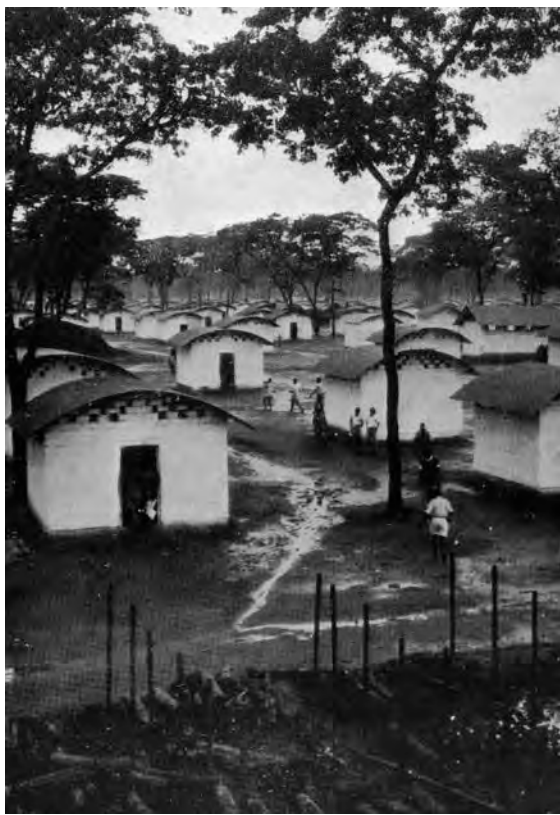
Weighing the baby, and mothers waiting for attention at the Nkana welfare clinic.

tropical bush. Already there are 1,600 white people and 10,000 natives living there.

Walk round the streets of Nkana; it is cool enough for walking, though they tell me that the best weather comes after the rainy season. Here is the new Rhokana Club, almost completed at a cost of £15,000 and built out of the profits made by the old club. Over the way is a cinema hall which cost £18,000. Every great “talkie” that comes to the Union reaches Nkana within a few weeks. All seats in the cinema are the same price, two shillings and three pence.

Nkana has banks and soda fountains, shops and hairdressers, garages – and a free bus service! The buses take the children to school and the mine pays. There is a free bus to the cinema, too, and a hotel-bus that runs employees backwards and forwards to the mine.

In Nkana I renewed acquaintance with the Mandala stores. The Scot who founded the firm wore spectacles. The native name for spectacles is “mandala,” so that today the firm is much better known by that name than by the official title of African Lakes Corporation, Limited. An adventurous firm it is, too, with a fine tradition of half a century of pioneering work in the Zambezi basin and round the Great Lakes. Mandala stores have built steamers, made roads, established banks, fought rebellious natives and slave traders and cultivated farms. In Blantyre, Nyasaland, the headquarters of the firm, is actually a fort with turrets and loopholes. The place was attacked by natives some years ago, the main gates were smashed, and in the fight that followed there was loss of life on both sides. A son of David Livingstone was among those who fell. When you buy a tin of cigarettes or biscuits at the Mandala



The native quarter at Nkana – Mile after mile of clean white huts.

stores you are patronising a shop with a background of history.

Bicycles and sewing-machines are the dreams of the ambitious native, and a fine day it will be for British industry when every African native's dream comes true. Outside every store in the Copper Belt sit native tailors, making clothes for those who cannot afford their own sewing-machines. Cheap clothes and easy riding down the narrow bush pathways that run like a jig-saw puzzle up and down and across Africa – these are real blessings given by civilised Birmingham to savage Africa.

The white people of the Copper Belt dress smartly on formal occasions; but bush jackets, khaki shirts and shorts or comfortable white clothes are still worn nearly every day by a large number of men, including high officials on the mines. These sensible fashions will gradually disappear, I am afraid, as the mine

townships grow into towns. Sun helmets of flawless white or battered khaki are common enough. Many people in the Copper Belt, however, both men and women, take risks with hats that make the careful visitor wonder how they avoid sunstroke.

In these scattered communities a motor-car is extremely useful, though motoring along roads which have been torn up by the tropical rains (fifty inches a year or more) is not a comfortable experience. You see the baby car in these parts, but even a heavy car seldom averages more than twenty miles an hour along the rough, red tracks lined with monotonous bush.

At night the wise driver keeps a sharp look-out for fallen trees in his path. There are rivers to be crossed by pontoon, too, where a hippo sometimes rises in the glare of the headlights, snorts and swims away. Petrol costs about three shillings a gallon in the

Copper Belt. It is fortunate that the distances between Ndola, the Roan, Nkana and Mufulira are not great.

Everyone at Nkana plays golf, and members of the club declare that the 18-hole course is the prettiest and the longest in Africa. Ant heaps form the hazards – great red mounds twenty feet high, some with thatched summer houses built on the summits. The grass fair-ways and cobalt slag greens, the hartebeest and lions that sometimes watch the play all make golf at Nkana unusually interesting.

Wherever South Africans settle you will find Rugby football flourishing; the grass football ground at Nkana is certainly finer than any playing field in the Union. Teams have travelled from Cape Town to play the enthusiasts of the Copper Belt. In the past cricket has suffered owing to the rainy season; but now it has been agreed that cricket will start in July. The cool, cloudless

weather from April to September, with frosty dawns, makes one of the most bracing climates in the world.

White children would thrive in the tropics of Northern Rhodesia if that splendid dry season lasted all the year round. A future difficulty, too, will be schools, for the Government schools on the mines do not offer secondary education. Nevertheless, the children I met in the Copper Belt showed no signs of that depression and languor which is one of the most pathetic sights elsewhere in the tropics. The troops of scouts and guides do not suffer from any lack of energy.

Tinned foods, with the possible exception of milk, have never been necessary in the Copper Belt. I was pleasantly surprised every day in hotels and private houses, to find tempting, nourishing dishes put before me. Everyone seems to live well – that is one of the secrets of successful resistance

to a tropical climate. All the hotels offered a great variety on every menu; and at one hotel the cooking was ambitious and perfect.

Beer and whisky (usually taken with water) are the drinks of Northern Rhodesia and these are not unduly expensive. The people of the mines are not heavy drinkers. They love their whisky at sundown; they drink it slowly and with obvious pleasure; they often need it, and I believe it does them good. At other times of the day and night – many other times – they take tea.

The farm at Nkana, started by the mine at a cost of many thousands of pounds, explains why everyone, white and black, is so well fed. Only a few years ago this was forest land. Now, at the peak of the season, the farm produces ten tons of vegetables a week – a wide variety sold at two pence a pound to Nkana residents. There are acres of mealies and bananas for the compound.

Orange trees grow exceedingly well. A gang of two hundred natives, who have their villages at the edge of the forest, are continually at work in the fields. Baboons and destructive monkeys sometimes raid the crops; but otherwise conditions are ideal for successful farming.

Nkana does not lose touch with the outside world, for every train brings someone back from leave, and holidays are usually spent overseas.

Leave ranges from three weeks to two months a year. No employee is allowed to remain at Nkana without a holiday for more than three years. Mining men are great travellers. There are no racial prejudices in the Copper Belt, and the principle of finding the best man for each particular job holds good. So Americans and Canadians, Cornish miners, Scottish engineers, craftsmen from most of the countries of Europe come and go, bringing

a rich experience to this new field of enterprise. There is hardly a mine of importance in the world, I suppose, where someone in the Copper Belt has not worked at some time or other.

Life in the tropical Copper Belt, then, is not merely bearable – most of the people there would not exchange it for similar careers elsewhere. The sense of isolation is vanishing. Often I had to remind myself that I was two thousand miles from Cape Town; a busy air about these rising towns dispels loneliness.

A few miles away from one of these civilised centres a geologist was killed by a lion, and a driller died from the bite of a cobra. Crocodiles still take their toll of human life in the rivers. Yet it is clear that the Copper Metropolis of tomorrow will not be influenced by its surroundings – the people of this new Africa will live securely side by side with the old.

“Wipe out malaria among the Europeans and pneumonia in the native compounds, and you could not wish for a healthier territory than the Copper Belt.” Dr. O. Hooper, Chief Medical Officer at Nkana, thus summed up for my benefit the health conditions in a land once regarded as a “White Man’s Grave.”

Malaria means bad air, which has nothing to do with the disease caused (as you all know) by the bite of the infected female mosquito called the anopheles. “Have you taken your quinine today?” ask public notices in many parts of tropical Africa. I swallowed my five grains of bitter quinine bihydrochloride every evening on the way to Northern Rhodesia. For nearly three centuries doctors have been telling us that quinine wards off malaria. Many doctors still believe it.

A strong body of medical opinion, experienced in tropical diseases, now holds

the view that quinine is no use in the prevention of malaria. When you come to think of it, practically everyone who has lived for long in a fever stricken district has suffered from malaria at some time or other – even those who have never missed a day’s quinine. I asked Dr. Hooper for the truth of the matter.

“I do not believe at all in prophylactic quinine,” replied Dr. Hooper at once. “It is a delusion and a snare. When I first arrived here I was prejudiced in favour of it. Since then I have seen large numbers of people suffering from headaches, general debility, loss of appetite and other symptoms which were confusing until I came to recognise them as mild forms of malaria.”

“That is what happens to people who take quinine every day. They do not suffer from acute malaria as we know it; but they do experience a mild form of the disease, not serious enough to send them to bed, but

nevertheless sufficient to incapacitate them. Quinine confuses the diagnosis – it does not prevent malaria.”

The proof is obtained by taking a blood slide after such a patient has left off quinine for a week. The blood is positive. Moreover, quinine taken over a large number of years produces secondary anaemia – a very bad thing for anybody. And it loses some of its power to cure when it is most needed if the patient’s system is already saturated with it.

Dr. Hooper and other medical specialists on the mines still recommend a daily dose of ten grains of quinine for men working in the bush far away from a doctor. They are almost certain to be bitten by infected mosquitoes; thus a mild attack of malaria is better than a severe one.

Quinine still maintains its place as the only reliable drug in the treatment of

malaria. Dr. Hooper recently tested a new method of treatment praised by the *British Medical journal*, in which a very high cure rate was claimed. The results were disappointing. Ten cases out of sixteen relapsed within three months.

The malaria in the Copper Belt is sub tertian or malignant malaria; but it is a mild form of the disease.

“There is something here which makes a difference,” declared Dr. Hooper. “The parasite is identical, yet it does not affect the patient as malaria on the East African coast does. Malaria here responds far better to treatment.” Malaria can be stamped out – or at least become unimportant – as a result of modern methods of control. At Nkana a control officer watches all possible mosquito breeding areas. His gang of fifteen natives sprays every stagnant pool every day with a mixture of crude oil, castor oil

and paraffin. Swamps have been drained. The grass and vegetation are searched for empty tins and bottles in which mosquitoes might breed. This is a task calling for great thoroughness – as long as one danger-spot remains, the menace of malaria is still there. Nevertheless, all the mines have succeeded to a large extent in banishing the disease from their townships. It has cost much money, but the money has been well spent.

When the first native labourers came to the mines it was not realised that the native pneumonia, caused by a streptococcus, was wholly different from pneumonia as Europeans know it. This disease became such a problem that the mine doctors were ready to explore any avenue which might lead to success. Research at Nkana and the Roan, and the assistance of Johannesburg specialists, led to the preparation of a vaccine. Now all natives on enlistment receive three inoculations before starting

work. The blood serum of convalescent patients is used for new cases, and the method promises favourable results. Unfortunately, the native has no idea of looking after himself – he has to be protected just as much as before.

Apart from pneumonia, native health is very good indeed. Dr. Hooper has not seen one case of the dreaded sleeping sickness in thirteen months at Nkana. In other parts of Rhodesia, motor-cars passing through “fly belts” are sprayed, for the tsetse loves shade and will cling to the cushions. The tsetse follows the game, too, and in some areas rifles have been issued to the natives to clear the bush of every wild creature. The mosquito, even the carrier of malaria, is a mild and harmless insect compared with the devastating tsetse fly, with its crossed wings and unexpected sting – usually given to a human being in the fold of the arm, the back of the neck, or wrist.

Civilisation cannot advance where the tsetse is prevalent. It moves mysteriously into territories where once it was unknown – Uganda, for example, where in the first six years of this century nearly a quarter of a million natives died from sleeping sickness. The Copper Belt is a tsetse fly belt. Fortunately, the tsetse is rarely seen within a few miles of the mines; possibly the sulphur fumes from the great smoke-stacks of the smelting plants help to keep it away. The modern treatment promises a lasting cure in many early cases of sleeping sickness – but everyone has a great respect for the tsetse, and prefers not to be bitten at all.

Next to sleeping sickness, I suppose, the tropical disease most feared is blackwater fever. There were nine cases at the Nkana hospital last year, but only one death. As the average death-rate may be estimated at about one in every three cases, the Nkana record suggests excellent nursing.

Blackwater was at one time regarded as an almost inevitably fatal disease. Its origin is obscure – a good subject for starting an argument among tropical disease specialists. “It is definitely a malarial disease, because it does not occur in a patient who has not had malaria,” Dr. Hooper told me. “Sometimes a new-comer to the tropics contracts blackwater very soon after arrival; but in such cases I think the malaria and the blackwater form a combined picture. Quinine, especially when it has been abused, plays its part in producing blackwater. Malaria and quinine in combination seem to render the red blood corpuscles liable to destruction.”

Sunstroke is fairly rare in the Copper Belt. The familiar “touch of the sun” is, in Dr. Hooper’s opinion, one of those symptoms which can often be put down to the onset of malaria. True dysentery, too, is uncommon; not more than half a dozen cases are treated at Nkana in a year. All

water supplied to the mine houses is purified by a sedimentation process. Milk and meat are carefully inspected. There was a typhoid epidemic at Nkana three years ago; but typhoid has been unknown since then, owing to improvements in the sanitary system.

Every native joining a mine receives a typhoid injection. Natives, by the way, do not escape malaria; but in them the disease runs a very mild course, and they are seldom found in hospital for treatment of malaria alone. Smallpox, too, is not nearly such a serious matter for a native as it is for a European.

The war of extermination against the mosquito will be won, once for all, in the mine settlements of the Copper Belt. At Nkana the annual death-rate today is only four per thousand, compared with London's twelve per thousand. It is not altogether a fair comparison, of course, for

Nkana has no very old people, and it is a carefully selected population. Nevertheless, the figures do prove that the Copper Belt is not a "White Man's Grave."

3

When you talk to men like Mr. W. C. Collier, discoverer of two great copper mines in Northern Rhodesia, the past comes to life and you can see at once the whole picture of ancient workings and modern effort.

Millions know the Roan Antelope mine by name. How many Wall Street stockbrokers realise that a chance shot from Bill Collier's rifle, a dead buck on a copper outcrop, led to the vast development of today?

One night in Nkana, Collier told me of those hard old days, when the white population of Rhodesia, north-east of the Zambesi, consisted of a Government



The Roan Antelope Mine.

outpost and a few missionaries, traders and prospectors. Collier was no raw newcomer even then. Years of service in the Bechuanaland Border Police, the Matabele Wars and the Boer War, had toughened him for the long trek into unmapped territory. Today, at sixty-four, tall Bill Collier, with his wide-brimmed felt hat, still looks fit for any safari that may come his way.

“We knew we were up against it,” said Collier. “When we fell ill – will-power pulled us through. It was get better or peg out. We had quinine, iodine and Epsom salts – nothing else in the medicine chest as far as I can remember. Fourteen donkeys carried our kit, and my partner and I had three Matabele servants.

“We nearly lost our donkeys crossing the Zambesi. About two hundred miles north of the Victoria Falls we entered the tsetse country, engaged carriers and left the

donkeys behind. Bad fellows those carriers – they had killed a man named Fairweather before we came. They marched stark naked. Their ideas of personal decoration consisted of knocking out their front teeth and wearing a topknot of hair three feet high that quivered as they walked.”

For months Collier lived on the country-game, meal, fowls and occasionally sweet potatoes. At last he came to the village of a chief, Kapopo, and found there a Native Commissioner named Jones, but known to the natives as. Bwana M’Kubwa – the Great Master.

“He treated us so well that when we parted I promised to name a mine after him if I had any luck,” went on Collier.” The country was so vast that my partner and I decided to separate. At a village not far from Kapopo I saw some low-grade copper – the natives were using it as medicine,



Mr W. C. Collier, discoverer of two great copper mines in N. Rhodesia.

dusting it on wounds. But they would not tell me where the copper was to be found.

“Late that evening, however, an old man promised to give me a clue. He acted as guide next day, and left me with the words: ‘Follow the river and you will find what you are seeking.’

“Soon afterwards I saw some roan antelope and shot one. It fell dead on the outcrop which afterwards became the Roan Antelope mine. That was in June, 1902.

“This discovery made me feel that the area was a likely one for intensive prospecting. I was hampered, however, by the great unwillingness of the natives to lead me to the sources of their supplies of copper. A very important chief named Shiwarra, they said, had told them not to encourage white people to enter their country. Shiwarra had been an Arab slave trader, one of Tippoo Tib’s men, and he had settled down near

where Ndola now stands, and built an Arab village, complete with mosque.

“I interviewed Shiwarra, but learnt nothing of value from that wily old potentate. It was a strange experience to find this village of square huts, with pictures of slave dhows painted on the walls, in the bush of Northern Rhodesia. There was no doubt that Shiwarra had terrorised the natives over a wide area. He was still slave raiding for domestic purposes, and making converts to Islam. Every morning and evening I heard the ‘Call to Prayer’ in his village.

“About this time I shot a hippo, and while the boys were cutting up the meat I found a copper bullet. The natives declared that the copper came from the Congo, but I was convinced there were rich mines in the neighbourhood.”

With prospecting hammer and pan Bill Collier combed the area by traversing – a

method which makes it difficult to miss anything of importance. A native named Asid became interested in the work and often accompanied Collier on hunting trips. When a buck was shot, Collier allowed Asidi to cut the throat in accordance with the Moslem custom, so that he could share the meat.

“Three weeks passed since my discovery of the Roan Antelope, and I had searched all the new area except one strip without finding a trace of copper,” went on Collier. “By this time Asidi had overcome some of his fear of Shiwarra. He knew that I was certain to find the mine so he offered to take me direct to the spot if I would start before dawn next morning.

“When daylight came, Asidi told me to go straight on. I walked on alone, through tall grass, and climbed the hill which can now be seen alongside the railway track. The great open working of the mine, which I



Mine labourers at Nkana with their rations.

named Bwana M’Kubwa, after the Native Commissioner, lay before me – a spectacular find.

“Some years afterwards a nice old lady told me I must have been pleased to find a rich mine so close to the railway line. She thought I had just stepped out of the train and made the discovery. I did not tell her that I had left the railhead at Bulawayo, nearly eight hundred miles to the south.”

Collier has been officially credited with his two great finds. There has been much argument, however, regarding the original discovery of Nchanga mine, where Collier now lives as caretaker.

“Nchanga was discovered and rediscovered more often than any other mine,” says Collier. “In my opinion Harry Sheppard – who called it the Cheshebe – found it in 1904. I have happy memories of Nchanga, for I first saw the place when there was nothing but a faint copper stain

on the surface. I watched the development and saw three hundred white people in the camp beside the Nchanga stream – ‘The Stream of the Bush Baby.’ Now the mine has shut down and I am sometimes alone again; but that job has given me more satisfaction than anything else I have tackled.”

4

I met another pioneer of the Copper Belt by chance at Nkana. He was Mr. J. E. Stephenson – known everywhere along the Great North Road as “Chirupula” Stephenson, the first magistrate appointed to the territory.

“Chirupula” is a regular Allan Quartermain, with a small beard and an air of command which enabled him to keep the upper hand of Shiwarra and the other slave traders he suppressed thirty years ago. He shook with silent laughter when I

asked him to explain the meaning of his native nickname.

“Four holders and a marker,” replied “Chirupula” Stephenson mysteriously at last. “I only had twenty-one askaris with me, you see, the country I had to rule was a large one, and there were no prisons. So I maintained law and order with a cane. ‘Chirupula’ means ‘beats all.’ It was the cheapest way. The government of the Copper Belt cost just over £600 for the first twelve months after my arrival: Four holders and a marker!”

The fact that slave and ivory raids were still possible in British territory at the beginning of the present century gives an indication of the remoteness of the Northern Rhodesia frontier as “Chirupula” Stephenson found it. Shiwarra and his men, armed with muzzle-loaders, fought a pitched battle with Belgian troops beside the Luapula river as recently as 1902. A

Belgian officer – “Bula Matadi” to the natives – bravely swam the river and entered the Arab stockade, where he was shot, either by Shiwarra or by a rascally ally named Chipembere.

Reinforcements were sent, and Shiwarra was chased across the border. The Belgians tried to extradite him, but Shiwarra claimed protection, it is said, under an old treaty with Rhodes.

When the railway crossed the Congo frontier in 1909, and Belgian and British officials celebrated the event at Sakania, fresh efforts were made to bring Shiwarra to justice. But the old Zanzibari ruffian lives on safely in British territory, a foreigner ruling the Balamba tribe and dreaming of the days when his power was far greater – before “Chirupula” Stephenson came.

Today “Chirupula” Stephenson has a splendid farm on the Great North Road,

seventy-five miles from Kapiri M'Poshi. Hundreds of motorists along that famous route remember his hospitality.

I have dealt so far with events and discoveries in the Copper Belt within living memory. But there are legends of white men penetrating these lonely forests of Northern Rhodesia long before such pioneers as T. G. Davey, who located the Broken Hill minerals, Frank Lewis, who pegged the Silver King and Sable Antelope, Grey, Collier, Moffat Thomson and the rest. These men put the Copper Belt on the map. There was "a lone grey company before the pioneers," however; and just as it is generally agreed nowadays that Livingstone was not the first white man to reach the Victoria Falls, so it must be granted that early Portuguese adventurers visited the Congo-Zambezi watershed and saw the green outcrop of copper. Indeed it is recorded that Portuguese traders crossed

Africa at the beginning of last century and observed the open workings in the Katanga.

Fortunately no mystery such as that of Zimbabwe surrounds the ancient workings in the copper country. The natives of the Katanga are skilled in the art of smelting copper. At the Roan Antelope mine I was shown a bar of native copper which, according to the manager, could be exported as blister copper with the modern product. A strange contrast it is to find the ancient, primitive industry still existing in some places almost side by side with enormous power stations and blast furnaces.

The natives took high-grade oxidised copper from the surface, selecting the best green malachite ore. They made bellows of goat skins, and sat round their little blast furnaces on their haunches, blowing steadily. As the ore melted, slag and copper ran down together. Refining was carried out by chopping up the slag, picking out the

beads of copper and reheating them. The finished product was hammered into bangles or beads, or the shapes known as “cruciform ingots,” which were carried down to Benguella or the East African coast by wretched cavalcades of slaves.

This trade must have started centuries ago, and the source of supply was the Belgian Congo mines. Mr. Collier declares that, apart from Bwana Mkubwa, the Northern Rhodesia mines had merely been scratched for medicinal purposes; and copper found south of the border in the form of ingots or crude pots probably came from the Congo.

It has been suggested that the shape of the “cruciform ingots,” which are like a St. Andrew’s cross, was influenced by the Phoenicians. These ingots are still being made by the natives and are used as currency, one ingot equalling twenty Congolese francs.

Practically every mine, both in the Katanga and in the Rhodesia copper belt, was first located through ancient workings or surface scratchings. Prospecting on modern lines has been so thorough since then that the discovery of a new Nkana or Roan Antelope is improbable. Nevertheless they tell you that the richest mine of all has been lost and may one day be found again – the Mine of a Thousand Bangles.

This mine (runs the story) was once shown to two prospectors by a native. It was an ancient working, cleverly filled so that all the surface indications were obliterated. The prospectors sunk a shaft. At seventy feet they found a clay ring of the type used many centuries ago for spinning thread; also a boulder streaked with copper. But the natives were hostile, and when the prospectors departed every trace of the mine was again hidden. Like the legendary “Hill of Copper,” in Namaqualand, the

Mine of a Thousand Bangles remains a secret known only to the tribesmen who guard their riches.

Bill Collier, as I have said, is happy as caretaker at Nchanga, and does not consider that position a poor reward for two discoveries worth millions. Mr. Moffat Thomson, who was magistrate at Ndolo when he located the Nkana mine, sold his claims for £100. The adventure is the thing that counts in Northern Rhodesia – the lucky strike, the long shot that comes off, the will-power that wins.

5

Millions are at stake when great mining companies open up new areas of possible wealth such as the concessions of Northern Rhodesia – the Copper Belt of today.

Next to nothing was known, in the geological sense, of this difficult territory when the work started about ten years ago. It was

the largest prospecting venture ever organised. The scores of experienced geologists of eight nations, under Dr. J. A. Bancroft and Dr. R. A. Pelletier, had to prove first of all that the copper was there; and secondly, to map the ore bearing “horizons” so that shafts could be sunk in the right positions. An area of about 135,000 square miles of territory was involved.

“I was out in the bush on that job once for a solid year, though the usual trip was two months,” Dr. T. D. Guernsey, the Canadian geologist at Nkana, told me. “Each survey party consisted of two geologists and thirty natives. The mine stores supplied us with full camp outfits, we lived on chickens and monkey-nuts and the game we shot – and we liked it. Sometimes we never saw another white face for weeks at a stretch.

“Lions and snakes? We heard lions at night often enough, but never saw one. I suppose we ought to have stepped on snakes every day in the tall grass, but I did not see more than one a month. No, it was a healthy life with nothing but fever to worry us. One geologist had appendicitis, but there were very few emergencies of that kind. It was a fine life for anyone fond of walking – we covered fifteen or twenty miles a day.”

Dr. Guernsey gave a rapid account of the work that went on day after day until the gigantic task had been completed. The prospecting parties set off soon after day-break, the geologists carrying compasses, the boys with four-pound hammers. With base lines blazed and quarter-mile stations to guide them, the geologists combed every yard of the area assigned to them. The natives, strung out at regular intervals, chipped samples from every rocky outcrop they encountered. Rewards

were paid for anything particularly interesting discovered.

Back in camp at three or four in the afternoon, the geologists would enjoy their tea and toast and then settle down to examine samples and fill in their blank maps. Rocks had to be recorded in full detail; villages and hills, paths and rivers all had to appear so that the men at headquarters could piece the field-maps together and see the vast copper country as a whole.

Long grass and rain hampered the work considerably. Nevertheless, it was found that two geologists with their gangs of natives could often cover about a hundred square miles a month without missing anything of importance. Next came the pot-holing and diamond-drilling to trace the ore bodies in the most promising areas. A pot-hole is about five feet in diameter; it goes through the overburden

of red soil, eighty feet of it sometimes, and exposes the rock formation below. Then the diamond-drillers (Americans, Canadians and South Africans are doing this work) set up huge tripods. The drill is really a pipe with diamonds set round the circumference, some projecting outwards very slightly, others inwards. They are amorphous diamonds called carbons, and they cost more than Kimberley stones – in the crown of one drill the diamonds would be worth £600.

The drill is rotated, water is pumped down inside the drill and flows up outside. The core barrel of the drill cuts out cylinders of rock and retains them, so that a complete section of the rock drilled is obtained. At Nkana the record depth reached by a diamond drill was 2,800 feet; the world's record, made by oil-drillers in California, being 10,000 feet.

Diamond-drilling is the supreme test of the value of a property. It explores the hidden reefs of a mine as modern medical instruments reveal the inner caverns of the human body. When diamond-drilling is unsuccessful the project must be abandoned. No mineralised area in the world has been more thoroughly investigated by these methods than the Copper Belt, and none with more satisfactory results.

So we come to the plans in the survey office at Nkana, the greatest mine in one of the richest copper-producing areas in the world. Twenty miles of ore are shown on these detailed maps, pock-marked with drill-holes; three ore bodies, fully proved, containing 127,000,000 tons of ore. Yet the ore horizon only comes to the surface at one spot – just one solitary green-streaked rock, which I was shown on the farm at Nkana, standing sentinel, as it were, over all this buried treasure.

This copper mine, you must understand, is like a boat covered with earth to her gunwales, her bows dipping downwards with only a fragment of her stern showing. The shape of the ore body, or syncline as geologists call it, was determined countless ages ago, when the flat surface of the earth was convulsed again and again; when early mountains were weathered and folded and obliterated. Geologists have been able to trace all these mighty changes, and in the Copper Belt their deductions have been right.

We are going underground now, with Dr. Guernsey as guide. Some kind of helmet is necessary, an old shirt and trousers, sea-boots and a miner's acetylene lamp. Bells are clanging at the central shaft, skips filled with ore are rising as we wait for the cage that will take us down.

Women are not allowed down the Nkana mine; the busy world of a mine is no place

for a woman, or a nervous man for that matter. The descent, of course, would seem slow and easy to anyone used to a deep Rand mine. "That's the 300-foot level," says the geologist after a few seconds as we pass a sudden patch of light. At 450 feet the cage stops and we emerge into the grey catacombs, lit by electricity, inhabited by gangs of natives wearing uniform hats strongly reminiscent of the tin hats of the war.

It seems strange to find an underground electric railway in Northern Rhodesia, with 13-ton locomotives hauling 10-ton trucks; yet we must cringe against the rough wall while the trains go by. Water pours out of huge taps set in the face of the conglomerate and runs muddily along channels to the pumps. "Toom-toom-toom" come the blasts of dynamite along the drives, blowing out our lamps.

Dr. Guernsey talks in the old Cornish mining language of stopes and raises, cross-cuts and grizzlies. He carries a hammer – this must be a geologist's paradise – chips off samples and interprets them for me. Sometimes it is steaming hot, but often a cool breeze dries the sweat trickling from our helmets.

So we climb steep ladders leading to undreamt-of mazes; we creep over planks bridging dark and terrifying depths; we crouch in tunnels that turn like a rabbit warren, while I wonder what would happen to a man who lost his sense of direction.

Where the pneumatic drills are at work the smell is of finely powdered earth. Then there is the reek of acetylene, and occasionally the fumes of dynamite. "A fine headache dynamite gives you if you get too much of it," remarks my guide. I am always glad to return to the wide, airy

drives from the little unsuspected passages and caves.

At times the geologist stops suddenly. "Always best to stop and wait for a while in a mine if you don't know exactly what is going on round the corner," he remarks with a chuckle. While we wait I can hear woodpecker noises in the surrounding rock walls – the chattering of distant drills. Three hours I spent down there: coffee and cigarettes in daylight tasted good after that long walk in the depths where the copper is won.

Follow the ore from the central shaft, where the trucks spill it into the crushers. Pounding, grinding, rolling, the crushers do their work. Rubber conveyor belts carry the ore from process to process, watched by natives who seize fragments of steel, rope or chain as the ore passes. There is beauty in this broken rock. You can see the glint of blue bornite and green malachite as

the endless belt goes on. Then the batteries of steel ball mills take over the task. Next the thickener, like a huge churn with a pungent smell – pine oil. Pine oil and acid are the reagents used in the process whereby the copper is floated off in bubbles.

By this time concentrates of copper have been obtained – fifty or sixty per cent copper. The reagents are washed out and the product goes to the smelter in the form of a slightly moist bluish green powder.

The time to visit the smelter is at night – it is a sensational spectacle for the newcomer. Here the reverberatory furnaces may be seen through blue glass, long furnaces kept white hot with pulverised fuel. The molten copper runs with a rocket-burst of sparks into a bucket holding twenty-five tons. It is like pouring out a golden cup of tea. When the converter has dealt with it, burning off the sulphur with

air, the molten mass goes into moulds and becomes “blister copper,” ready for shipment.

The railway reached these mines only a few years ago. Journeying from one to another through the wild, unchanged forests, it is impossible to escape a deep sense of astonishment that such progress should have been made on such a grand scale along this lonely frontier.

6

Eleven miles of clean white huts, 10,000 native men, women and children, steaming kitchens, welfare clinics, markets, cinema, school and hospital – that is the great compound at Nkana in the Copper Belt of Northern Rhodesia.

News has travelled along the native paths concerning the good food and the money to be earned in the Copper Belt. There is no recruiting for the mines at the present time.

The natives come marching across country in single file, converging on Nkana at the rate of a hundred a day, eager to find work in this astounding place the white man has created where only a tangle of bush grew before.

From the Wawemba country and Barotse-land they come; from Portuguese colonies to the east and west; from the Congo and the Lakes, and from every corner of Rhodesia. Some cover incredible distances on foot; their homes are so far away that one wonders how word of the copper mines reached them. Mr. W. J. Scrivener, the compound manager, showed me records in his office of natives at Nkana from Sierra Leone and Nigeria. The Union, Bechuanaland, Tanganyika, are all represented in that immense compound. It is a gathering of clans knowing no political boundaries – one of the best-fed and most contented groups in Africa.

There are scores of little tribes in Northern Rhodesia, offshoots of peoples driven from their own territories by the wrath of Chaka, some of Zulu stock and some Basuto. Languages are a difficulty. Chinvanja, the “language of the Lake,” has been officially adopted by the police, just as the Belgians across the border recognise only Kiswahili in their dealings with the natives. On the mines they are trying to solve the problem by teaching the “boss boys” English, though one hears the lingua franca of “Low Kaffir” spoken every day.

“Practically every trouble which arises between white and black is due to this lack of understanding,” declared Mr. Scrivener, “The natives are willing enough, but they cannot always get an order right. A good white miner is not necessarily a good linguist. ‘Kitchen Kaffir’ has no range. Fortunately the native learns like a child, he is not at all self-conscious, and he picks up English far, more readily than we would

master a native language. So we have a night-school where English – and particularly English as spoken by miners – is taught.”

Outside the compound office a line of new arrivals, having passed the doctor, awaited the final inspection by Mr. Scrivener. Native-police boys, in their smart red fezzes, blue jerseys and white shorts, came to attention as the compound manager passed down the ranks. “These Wawembas are the best of the bunch,” he remarked to me. “Nothing raw about them – they have been working in mines for thirty years. We get all sorts, of course. Sometimes you hear cheering in the compound, and you know that a party of Kalwenas has entered; they are always stark naked, and so unsophisticated that they will carry a wheelbarrow until you show them how to handle it.”

The gates of the Copper Belt compounds are never closed – there are no diamonds here, and the natives off duty have complete freedom. I watched them filing past the steam cookers, each boy drawing a basin full of fragrant mealie meal and hot beans. An ingenious device is used for issuing the ration of meat and bananas – a trap-door at the end of a chute. A native policeman raises the door, the ration drops out and the boy passes on satisfied that there has been no unfair division of the food.

The weekly scale of rations of meal, beans, meat, fresh vegetables, peanuts and salt as laid down by the Government is generously interpreted by the mines. First-class cooking is the rule, and no native goes to bed hungry. Every mine boy coming off shift receives hot cocoa and bread. The women, of course, are more difficult to satisfy. Married women draw rations for their husbands; they arrive

1,600 strong every morning, jostling for the best places in the queue, and arguing about their food tickets. "I would rather feed two thousand men than a hundred women," a weary compound official told me.

Wives and children, by the way, are fed by the mine – a boy has only to announce that he is married, and his whole family is secure, with a free roof over their heads. A boy may not take more than one wife, however; not because the mines are opposed to polygamy, but because of the housing shortage. "The price of a bride is rather low in these parts," the compound manager told me. "I have seen them go for as little as a shilling. The work the husband had to do for the mother-in-law is another matter."

One thousand of the Nkana compound's ten thousand are children. Mr. Nutter, welfare officer and missionary, took me to

his baby clinic one day. The mothers, dressed in bright calicoes, had brought their babies to be weighed and to receive a free ration of soap. When a baby shows no increase in weight, Mr. Nutter becomes suspicious and cross-examines the mother. "You took the child to Ndola to see his grandmother, did you?" he says. "Well, the journey has done the baby no good." As a result of this careful inspection, many babies are sent to hospital, before their complaints become serious.

Three hundred children stood up and clapped as we entered the school. Some of the older pupils were learning English, and the native teacher was trying to make them understand the difference in pronunciation between the "l" and "r" sounds – an entirely new thing to them. "Grass" they would shout firmly when he wrote "glass" on the blackboard. Nyasaland boys are the best pupils; the local

Lamba tribe are not very quick-witted. Girls were learning to sew cleverly enough, however, and the writing on the slates – mining words again – was good.

The welfare shop displayed native workmanship; benches covered with rushes, bags for dynamite, sandals made out of old tyres, pottery and uniforms. The natives build their own huts, too; two hundred new ones went up last dry season.

Dancing to the drums, the great entertainment all over tropical Africa, is the chief amusement in the Nkana compound. A weird array of musical instruments may be seen during a short walk – gourds with strings, wooden sounding boards with metal keys, calabashes beaten like xylophones, and queer bamboo contraptions with wires which the players twirl against their mouths.

All over the compound you see holes scooped out of the ground in neat rows for one of the oldest games in Africa – a sort of Arab draught-board on which beans are used.

Some use ordinary playing cards, inventing games of their own, gambling with matches, razor blades and candles, but not money.

Thousands of natives in the Copper Belt have strange ideas of the value of money. They do like to feel they are in possession of large sums of money, and it is a common thing for two boys to pool their wages; one takes both pay envelopes one month, and the other takes both the next. A boy may be earning three times as much as his partner, yet he cannot see anything ludicrous in this arrangement. Savings banks, which are open to them every pay-day, very few understand. They prefer to bury their money under the floor of the

hut, or leave it with a friend – and the friend usually spends it immediately.

As a spender, the native does know what he wants. A huge mail-order business is done with British firms, and every post brings a heap of catalogues (often never claimed) from London and Manchester. There are Beau Brummel's in these compounds, sturdy fellows who wear their plus fours with the inimitable swagger of the African native. Gaudy pullovers are popular, and some have been known to fill in self-measurement forms correctly and obtain dress suits from famous London outfitters. Caps and blazers are fashionable just now – I saw one native wearing a cap with the legend. "Play up, Fulham!"

Native taste in blankets and cloths is, to say the least, conservative. A woman does not merely ask for a blanket; it must be a blanket of the same pattern, colour and size as the last one she bought. Give her a sheet

of calico, and without the aid of a pin or a stitch she will drape it round herself with a natural artistry which a Paris dress designer would admire.

Great loads of clothing and rolls of material are taken when a mine labourer and his family set off for their distant home after a year or more at Nkana. (Bachelors cycle away joyfully every five or six months, but the married men remain longer.) Pots, pans, boxes and suit-cases – these are their rewards for labour. Their standard of living is rising every year. At one time sleeping-mats were used in practically every hut in the compound; now many have beds. The huts are well kept, and many are decorated with paintings on the walls – a white hunter being chased by a lion seems to be the favourite design.

African films are enjoyed above all others by the natives at the weekly cinema shows,

given free in the compound. They appreciate every point in a hunting picture like "Simba." But they love Felix, too, and Western dramas and old-fashioned comedies involving the destruction of property never fail to delight them. A native beer-hall has just been opened by the Northern Rhodesia Government at Nkana. With a swimming bath and all these other amusements, the great black population is content. Native welfare on the mines is watched by men with long experience of the country and of native psychology. Every effort is made to fit a boy into the right job. If he does not give satisfaction in one department, he is usually given a second chance elsewhere. Tricks of temperament are carefully studied. A native who has lost an arm or leg, for example, suffers from a mental awkwardness for some time afterwards; he is hard to handle, and will burst into the office every day to make insolent

demands. This peculiarity is well understood, and a disabled native is given time to settle down to some task he can easily perform.

The compound manager could tell many stories of native cunning. He decided there was nothing wrong with the intelligence of the mine boy when he discovered one labourer who had done no work for a fortnight, but had drawn his pay and rations all the time by means of a series of the most ingenious frauds. A large staff of trained native clerks with typewriters and modern office equipment check all time cards and keep an elaborate hut register. This labourer had outwitted them all.

A dressing station has been established in the compound so that small cuts and injuries can be treated immediately the boys arrive from the mine. The native attendants in their white uniforms with red cross badges know their work, and the

system prevents neglected wounds becoming serious. The safety of the natives, both on the surface and underground, is guarded in every possible way. Posters printed in half a dozen native languages, and vividly illustrated, catch the eye in the compound. "Mine Boys!" warns one. "Many underground boys know that dynamite is dangerous. Help those who do not know, and explain to them the danger of explosives."

Native foods and luxuries may be seen, and smelt, too, in the markets of the Nkana compound. Here are dried caterpillars, live fowls in fantastic coops, sweet potatoes and kassava, gourds of honey, cooked mealies, all the tempting dishes of the tropics. Fishing is a great industry in Central Africa – the fishermen come to Nkana from the Bangweolo swamps and the Luapula with baskets of smoked bream and barbel. These fish are black,

unappetising in appearance, and bony, and the natives love them.

No attempt is made to Europeanise the natives on the mines. At the Roan Antelope (where Mr. F. Ayer, General Manager, explained the policy to me) many of the tribes in the compound have the privilege of electing elders to settle small grievances and quarrels.

The Roan compound is the most favourably situated in the Copper Belt, standing as it does on rising ground and separated by a little river from the mine itself and the white settlement. The huts are thatched, and are far more comfortable than any built by the natives themselves in their own villages.

"Some people wonder what will happen to the native in the future when he leaves the mines and returns to a entirely different mode of life-namely, farming," remarked Mr. Ayer. "We are trying to meet this

problem of detribalisation by giving every married labourer a small farm, where his wife and children can raise crops. This keeps them in touch with the seasons and the old village life; you can tell they are happy, for they are always singing in the fields.”

Streets in the Roan compound are named after animals – the “Street of the Rabbits” goes right round the place, while Elephant, Buffalo and Lion Streets cut through the lines of quaint, peaked huts. Near the river is a canteen where a native can buy a loaf of bread and a mug of tea at cost price – three pence. Here, too, he can read the Nyasaland native newspapers and meet his friends. Compound officials tried to organise games at night in the canteen: but they discovered the natives preferred a good talk among themselves to any other amusement. A flute band has been formed for the young boys, however, and may be heard playing Scottish airs!

Such are the compounds of the Copper Belt, with their teeming mixtures of native races. When you see all those types assembled, men of at least a hundred tribes on the pay-rolls of the mines, you realise that the native is the greatest African traveller of all. They say a native cannot lose his way in the bush. He can visualise country he has never seen – it is this unfailing instinct which brings him to his destination by the easiest route.

At regular intervals a native trader in beautifully dyed leather visits Nkana. He comes from Kano, the walled city of the Nigeria, and he travels overland. That journey of considerably more than two thousand miles reveals the distances natives will cover when they have an object in view.

It has been predicted that the copper mines of the Katanga and Northern Rhodesia will one day become the hub of Africa. As far

as the natives are concerned, these words have come true along the narrow, native trails, unknown to Europeans, not mapped like the Great North Road, but all leading after many weeks to the journey's end in the Copper Belt.



They grow paw-paws in their gardens in Northern Rhodesia.

CHAPTER 17

MYSTERIES OF THE DUNES

A thousand fantasies
Begin to throng into my memory,
Of calling shapes, and beck'ning shadows
dire,
And airy tongues that syllable men's names
On sands and shores and desert wildernesses.

MILTON

NORTH run the sand dunes from the very shores of Table Bay – a coast wall more than a thousand miles long, the burial ground of much old adventure and untold mysteries.

This belt of dunes is the real Sahara of Southern Africa; you cannot call the Kalahari a true desert, for it supports life. The coastal Namib Desert hides in its ever-changing dunes the skeletons of many a band of lost prospectors and many a shipwrecked crew. Sometimes the dunes are mere hummocks, their line broken by seaports, rocks and rivers. Then they rise,

in a wilderness of sand, to ramparts seven hundred feet high. These are the great *barchan* dunes, crescent-shaped, yellow with pink crests and moving forward inevitably at a rate of hundreds of feet a year. These are the dunes that swamp everything in their path, and uncover the relics years later.

Here is one true tale of the dunes with a climax as grim as any work of imagination. In 1905, when Germany ruled this desert coast, a military officer named Rogge set out on horseback, accompanied by Trooper Fiebecke, from the port of Luderitzbucht carrying pay and mails for the soldiers stationed at a lonely outpost in the Namib. They were reported missing. Search parties on camels travelled from water-hole to water-hole without finding a trace of them.

Six years later Fiebecke's belt and bayonet were picked up in the dunes. The sand moved on and revealed a clue. In 1912, a

police patrol found the body of Rogge – mummified by the dry sand, and easily recognisable. All the letters and the pay (20,000 marks, then worth £1,000) were found in Rogge’s pockets. There was also a note written by Rogge himself, saying good-bye to his mother and sister in Germany. “Lost in the desert,” came the voice from the past. The horses have run away. Fiebecke has gone to look for water. It is hopeless. I am going to shoot myself to avoid death from thirst.”

Sixteen more years passed, and a skull and a heap of scattered bones were uncovered by the sand and taken by the finder to the nearest doctor. “It is the skull of a white man – see what else you can find there,” instructed the doctor. A further search was made, and a metal disc, bearing the German eagle and the number 1213, was recovered. The disc was sent to Berlin and identified – it had belonged to Fiebecke. So the remains of Fiebecke were given a

military funeral and laid alongside the grave of the officer Rogge in Luderitzbucht cemetery. Thus finally ended one drama of the dunes.

Native deserters from the diamond fields near Luderitzbucht have perished by the score in the Namib. In one year alone more than sixty labourers died of thirst, or threw themselves into the sea, during the ghastly southward trek to the Orange River. Some of their skeletons were found five years later. Diamond raiders, white and black, have lost their lives in this dry wilderness of dunes that the Germans called *Sperrgebiet* – forbidden territory.

Further north, on the arid Huab plateau near Swakopmund, two skeletons were found with blankets, clothes and a rucksack. The names of those men were never discovered. Possibly they were prospectors, following a secret trail of their own, perishing like so many others in the

quest of wealth. Simply another tragedy of the dunes that have swallowed up men and carts and pack-animals, revealing a few old secrets and keeping many more forever.

An old prospector once described to me his journey over the dunes into unexplored country at the time when the South West African diamond discoveries were luring hordes of adventurers to the desert.

“You move in a silent world,” he said. “You don’t want to talk – it makes you thirsty. There is only the shuffling of feet as the horses and pack-donkeys struggle up the steep dunes and slip down the far sides. Wonderful, tireless carriers, the donkeys, with their water-drums slung over the saddles. In some places the sea has breached the dunes, forming quick-sands; the horses seem to know those places. Then you find a stretch of hard beach at low tide, with whalebones set up by previous travellers as sign-posts,

warning you to turn inland. But the queerest sign of all that I ever saw was a human skull with a noticeboard: ‘Watch your water-bottles.’ The dune country is windswept, waterless, desolate – yet it has a fascination men never forget.”

It is the Benguella current from the Antarctic, intensely cold, that makes both the desert and the dunes. Sweeping along close inshore from the Cape to the Congo, this icy stream robs the landward breezes of their moisture. The water vapour condenses to form sea fogs instead of rain. Current, sea and wind combine to bring sand on shores – and that dries at low tide and swells the gigantic dunes.

Sand gathers where any obstruction bars the way. A mole built by the Germans at Swakopmund, for example, was swamped by sand within a few years and rendered useless. Many of the ports on

this coast are sheltered by spits of sand that grow longer year by year and sometimes close up the very harbours they created. The dunes have blocked river entrances, too, so that you have to dig through the sand to find fresh water. Only the largest rivers of South West Africa maintain clear passages to the sea. The rest run underground, below the choking grip of the dunes.

For seven months of the year the sou'-sou'-west wind moves these untold thousands of tons of sand onwards. Known to the Hottentots as the "soo-ooopwa," this is a wind to be feared. It carries the sand in stinging particles that fill every crevice. When it blows up really hard the houses in Luderitzbucht and Walvis Bay are shuttered and barricaded and sealed against it. Huge rocks are worn away by the sand blasts. A bottle left exposed to these sandstorms is pitted and frosted, and finally eaten away.

In one part of the Namib the sand dunes cover an area of 8,500 square miles, and the desert stretches inland from the coast for ninety miles. Scores of labourers have to be employed to keep the railway line from Luderitzbucht clear of sand – an endless task, accomplished only by covering the windward sides of the dunes with sacks and thus retarding the drift.

At Hottentot Bay there is a wreck in the dunes, an old wooden ship with only her stern jutting out of the sand. Gold coins bearing the Dutch East India Company's "V.O.C." mark have been discovered by prospectors at this spot. One prospector, indeed, washing gravel hopefully, found both diamonds and gold coins in his sieve. It is not difficult to imagine the treasure which would be uncovered if the dunes could be swept away into the sea.

Somewhere in this wilderness of dunes is the legendary "Bushman's Paradise,"

where diamonds lie heaped in a pool of clear, fresh water. The evidence in favour of this romantic tale is the fact that Bushmen have entered this desert, survived the great thirst, and returned with beautiful diamonds. Expedition after expedition has failed to locate the spot – skeletons along the trail through the dunes mark some of the failures.

Weird secrets these dunes hide. Go far enough north, beyond the last police outpost at Ugabmund, and you come to a coast uninhabited, unexplored and only roughly charted. Old Portuguese maps depict a fine harbour which they called Angra de St. Ambrosia, on this coast. The place was apparently rediscovered by the American navigator, Morrell, who described the anchorage and the many springs of good water. Yet when H.M.S. *Swallow* searched for St. Ambrosia later in the last century all that could be found was a group of rocks. It was thought that

the dunes had gradually filled in the harbour and blocked the entrance.

In some parts of this long coastal desert there is a pebbly crust which preserves footprints for years – only the rain will wipe them out, and twenty years may pass without a heavy shower. So the airman flying down the West Coast route to the Cape may see in the desert below tracks left there long before an aeroplane was seen in that desolate land. It is a disquieting thought, but not an improbable one, that the dunes which have covered so many lost ships and men may in the future grip lost air liners, too, and cover them with tons of sand.

CHAPTER 18

THE PASSING OF THE GREAT BEASTS

THE retreat of the large game animals from the Southern tip of Africa, fighting a magnificent rear-guard action over a thousand miles as they went, formed a series of dramatic episodes almost within living memory. Indeed, I have heard of the passing of the last hippos in the Cape Province from men who were close to the places where the last shots were fired.

Who killed the last lion in these parts, the last rhino, quagga, zebra and wildebeest? Here the information is not so precise, for the old Cape Colony was a vast area, and in those days wild animals were not news. Nevertheless, it is possible to make something more than a guess about some of these final encounters. It is a fascinating study at a time when new game reserves are being proclaimed from Egypt to the Cape; though no laws will bring the beautiful

quagga back to the southern hillsides or the blundering white rhinoceros to the burning sands of Bushmanland.

There is some doubt whether certain animals, such as the giraffe, ever grazed as far south as the present city of Cape Town. But about the lion there can be no argument. Van Riebeeck, the first Dutch Governor of the Cape, met a lion in his garden in 1653. During the same year the roaring of lions one night was so ominous that it seemed they were about to take the fort by storm. A dozen years later, however, the lions had left the Cape Peninsula for the wilder hunting grounds of the Stellenbosch and Hottentot Holland's mountains. During their northward journey a lion carried away an armed sentry from a Dutch East India Company's, outpost on the Berg River. In those flintlock days an encounter with a lion was a dangerous adventure. Today I know a man who shot five lions in six seconds.

Early last century lions were still plentiful in the Cape Colony. The main body moved north; but here and there isolated packs remained, cut off by pioneer settlements from their fellows. Burchell, the famous traveller, saw a lion beyond Carnarvon in 1811. Lions raided the cattle at Beaufort West up to 1820, so that hardly a month passed without the killing of one lion at least. At Graaff Reinet a few years later a Mr. W. C. van Ryneveld shot five lions. By 1845 the fierce Uitenhage packs had taken refuge in the Sundays River bush, one of their last strongholds.

Scully, the South African author (a reliable authority), declares the last lion killed south of the Orange River was an old fellow roaming in the Tsomo Valley, near Queenstown, in 1865. There may have been later survivals along the unexplored lower reaches of the Orange River. If there were, they probably moved across the river

into the Kalahari Desert, where their descendants live.

Lions were reported in the Griqualand West area ten years later, but I can find no evidence of this late reappearance. Possibly they were leopards.

More tenacious than any other wild beast, and more wary, the leopard still menaces poultry and flocks in many parts of the Cape Province. It was thought that the shooting of one on a Constantia farm in 1914 marked the extinction of the leopard in the Cape Peninsula. Yet at the time of writing, twenty-one years later, there is still a solitary leopard prowling in the caves and kloofs of Table Mountain. But the lions have trekked on. In all Natal, according to Colonel Denys Reitz, there are now only ten lions. It seems a very long time since the lion strode unafraid along the very edge of Table Bay.

The rhinoceros was one of the first of South Africa's monsters to yield and lumber away from the white man at the Cape. Its Dutch name remains, scattered all over its old haunts – a Rhenoster Kop here, a Rhenosterfontein there, with scores of farms, vleis, spruits and rivers telling of the departed giants.

It is recorded that a party of Van Riebeeck's men killed what must have been the first rhinoceros to fall before foreign invaders. The rhino was heavily bogged in the Great Salt Pan – now the Rietvlei Motor Speedway – near Cape Town. As their bullets glanced off the thick hide, the hunters adopted the rather unsporting method of slashing an opening in the side of the rhinoceros and firing into that.

During most of the eighteenth century the black rhinoceros roamed freely in the less accessible parts of the Cape, beyond the

fringes of settlement. According to the author Barrow, the white rhinoceros was still found in Bushmanland in 1796. Today there are only two known herds of this rare species – one in Zululand, the other in the Sudan – both carefully protected. Barrow's statement is interesting, because it suggests there may be some truth in the rumours one hears occasionally of a white rhino herd in the unexplored Kaokoveld of South West Africa. That is the direction the Bushmanland rhinos would probably have taken in their slow retreat from the Orange River.

The black rhinoceros survived in the Cape until the middle of last century, the Fish River bush providing him with a last sanctuary. A famous hunter named Bezuidenhout, who had shot many rhinos in his youth, probably had a hand in the destruction of the last one of all. This was a large and aged male which had forty bullets in his hide. Bezuidenhout was known as "Old Veldbroeks," owing to the old-

fashioned leather breeches he wore. These breeches once saved his life – a wounded rhino caught his horn in them and carried Bezuidenhout for some distance until they passed beneath a tree. Bezuidenhout clung to a branch and escaped.

Only a tiny relative, the dassie or rock-rabbit, now dwells in the Cape to remind us of the rhinoceros.

Mountains of biltong, fresh meat and fat, and piles of sjamboks were provided by the Cape hippos for two centuries after the Dutch occupation. They owed their long survival, I think, to the fact that a hippo's nostrils and eyes on the surface of a river make a poor target even for a modern rifle. The last hippo in the Berg River, within one hundred miles of Cape Town, was shot in 1869. It might have lived on for many years; but the farmer whose grandson told me the story was bound to take action, for

the hippo had killed a coloured boy bathing in the river.

A small herd of hippos was still to be found at the mouth of the Orange River several years after the end of the Great War. The farmer who shot the last of them – the last Cape hippo of all – was brought before the magistrate. "Not only the farmer appeared in court, but also a large chunk of that historic hippo," the magistrate told me. It was a clear case of self-defence, however, and the farmer was acquitted.

The giraffe, as I have said, must be regarded as a doubtful visitor south of the Orange River. There is a Hottentot tradition that the giraffe once inhabited the territory where Queenstown now stands; and this is supported by the discovery of giraffe caricatures in Bushman caves. Giraffes were shot so close to the Cape Colony border that it is not unlikely that they once browsed to the south of the river.

The Cape Province coat of arms displays a gemsbok and a black wildebeest. The gemsbok is believed to be the animal which gave rise to the unicorn fable; for the two horns, viewed in profile, appear like one. It has survived all the forays of the skin and biltong hunter. The black wildebeest, I am told, has escaped complete extinction in the south; but is now found only on one or two farms in the Victoria West district, where it has been preserved for nearly half a century.

Such was the fate of the large game beasts in the Cape. The freaks of chance which left small herds and solitary animals isolated in remote places make a fascinating study. Though it seems inevitable that wild animals and man cannot live side by side in a wholly civilised country, the retreat of the game must remain a tragedy to the naturalist. Only in the circus, the zoo and the museum

may the people of Cape Town now see the former inhabitants of the Table Valley.

CHAPTER 19

MALAY “MAGIC”

YOU cannot live in Cape Town for long without hearing tales of Malay magic and weird stories of Malay “doctors.”

Few people realise, however, the grip and fascination this sinister “magic” possesses for thousands – white and coloured. If you doubt it, ask your own servant, and hear how reverently she discusses the experiences of friends who have fallen under the spell. Ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church in the country will tell you that this menace is not confined to the coloured people. Like many other hidden things, a list of victims would cause a sensation.

“Malay magic” has been mentioned in hundreds of criminal trials in the Cape. It is a tradition – the Malays have been settled at the Cape for three centuries – and denunciations from the pulpit and by

doctors have not shaken it. A wretched fraud, it survives and flourishes wherever superstitious people are found.

Malays have done good, honest work in Cape Town ever since the Dutch East India Company brought them from the East to supply the young colony with skilled labour. They are still a race apart, noted for their clean living and all the habits which make good citizens. It is unfortunate for this respectable community that dangerous charlatans should exist among them. Genuine Malay doctors, with high medical degrees gained in Britain, must resent the presence of the quacks most of all.

I think the European, with his queer belief in Oriental magic, is largely to blame. The Malay “doctor” could not have established himself without some encouragement.

The country doctor, indeed, might well envy both the faith and the fees received from patients by the Malay quack. A fee of

£300 is not unknown; you cannot expect the services of a magician for a guinea a visit.

It is when modern medicine fails and the doctor states frankly that the patient has an incurable disease – then it is that someone whispers: “Call in a Malay.” Remote people in the country districts have no knowledge of science and the limitations of human power to guide them. Often enough they have put the disease – particularly mental symptoms – down to some supernatural cause long before the arrival of the Malay. This attitude of mind, a definite state of belief and expectant anticipation, simplifies the task of the Malay “doctor.” (He is quite a psychologist, and he knows very well how an atmosphere of mystery assists him.)

So the Malay drives up to the farm-house at night in the closed car which has been sent for him. He mutters his ritual in each

corner of the sick-room. Sometimes he adapts his Oriental wisdom to the Christian mind and makes the sign of the Cross on the patient’s forehead.

By this time the Malay has got his bearings, the ground is prepared for his illusion, and he can proceed to astound the sick person and the family.

“You had a labourer working on the farm and you discharged him?” suggests the Malay. “You beat him – now he has a grudge against you.”

This is a fairly safe guess, and one on which the Malay almost invariably relies. What farmer has never discharged a servant? After a little thought the family remember such an event, and the Malay produces the next trick in his bag.

“This labourer,” he says solemnly, “has been to a witch-doctor and obtained *toergoed* (accessories of magic) to bewitch

you. He has buried it near the house. Come!”

In the darkness (never in daylight) the Malay leads the members of the family out into the veld. He measures off spaces at intricate angles. His movements are unhurried and mysterious, heightening the illusion and inspiring awe in the spectators. “Emotion is the death of the intellect,” declared Dr. Stekel of Vienna, and here we have an interesting example. There is no intellectual appreciation of what is taking place. The spectators merely feel that what the Malay has outlined must occur. Anything the Malay now demonstrates is real to them.

The Malay takes a spade and digs a hole. He does not roll up his sleeves; but then his audience is not critical. Presently he bends down with an exclamation and takes a queer assortment of objects from the hole. Usually there is a frog, a toad or a

lizard, followed by a few old bones and a bottle of dark liquid.

Any drawing-room conjurer could perform the same trick in a well-lighted hall; but he would not have such an audience. These people on the farm are intent on the production of articles. I do not know, but I imagine that in such a favourable atmosphere the Indian rope trick could be successfully performed.

If the patient is a neurotic suffering from delusions of persecution this mysterious procedure may give him great relief. Psychologists hold that by giving such a person the limelight he craves – the attention and sympathy of his family and friends – the patient establishes some form of superiority which he has always lacked in life. The removal of the evil influence completes the cure.

Treatment at a mental hospital, if the case is curable, would achieve the same result

more safely and surely, and at a fraction of the cost. The Malay “doctor’s” reputation, however, is greatly enhanced by each success. His failures remain hidden, for a white farmer does not spread the news abroad that he has called in a Malay.

When the disease is physical the Malay has a number of prescriptions which he makes up himself. A doctor who practised for some years in the country and investigated the origin of these medicines gave me an interesting explanation. They are the old medicines of the Netherlands, taken to the East by Dutch physicians and copied by the Malays. Many of the medicines are extracts of chinchona bark and essential oils. Thus has the Oriental stolen the European doctor’s thunder!

The Malay’s medicines are not poisonous or even harmful – but they are entirely useless in the majority of cases. Fees, as I have said, are high and they are paid in

instalments at each visit. Even when the patient dies the family will not resist payment for fear of the “doctor’s revenge.”

It is as a surgeon, I think, that the Malay surpasses himself. “My father had a lizard in his arm and a Malay cut it out,” my servant informed me the other night. The belief that lizards and other living creatures establish themselves in the human body is a deep-rooted conviction among many coloured people in the Cape. Imagine the intense relief of the patient when the Malay makes an incision in a swelling and produces the lizard. Even the sight of one’s appendix in a bottle beside the hospital bed cannot give a greater satisfaction. The Malay’s sleight-of-hand is more impressive than the skill of a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons.

The love potion is another profitable item in the Malay “doctor’s” pharmacopeia. In town and country a coloured person who is

unsuccessful in love frequently goes to a Malay for medicine and charms. This gives the confidence which leads to victory.

The obliging Malay will also carry out the reverse process – he will relieve a husband of a nagging wife and use his influence in every human triangle drama with an audacity which few of us would care to imitate.

I do not suppose that such interference could be carried out very successfully among educated people, though the fashionable woman who believes in fortune-tellers is really just as gullible as the factory girl who goes to a Malay to estrange her lover and his wife.

In such a case the Malay's first task is to bring to the notice of the wife the fact that she is going to be bewitched. This essential factor is accomplished by gossip – the Malay plants the suggestion in the mind of someone who is sure to pass it on.

Fear in the mind of the wife is a natural result, for we are dealing with people who do not read very much and who are not protected by a veneer of education.

Every little headache or unimportant accident is now magnified and becomes due to the influence of magic. The tormented mind distorts the perception and clouds the understanding. In this state of nervous tension the wife becomes more and more aware that it is through her association with her husband that these mysterious incidents are taking place. The instinct of self-preservation is strong. Impulsively she leaves her husband and breaks the spell. If she does not, a mental breakdown may follow.

You hear references to such criminal tricks as these in evidence often enough. To prove a charge against a Malay "doctor" is another matter.

The belief of the Cape coloured people in Malay magic is well known to the medical officers at mental hospitals. Relatives are convinced that patients are not insane, but bewitched, and their view remains unaltered after the doctors have done their utmost to persuade them that they are wrong.

They plead with the officials to release patients from the hospital so that they can take them to a Malay “doctor” who knows more about such matters. The patients themselves frequently rave about the person who “Malay tricked” them.

There is nothing more remarkable than ordinary human wickedness, ingenuity or skill in any trick performed by the Malay “doctor.” A great atmosphere of magic has been built up around the Malay sword ordeal or Khalifa – which, by the way, has no evil significance and is carried out by some fine young men.

I sat watching a Khalifa for hours one night in a white-faced old house in the Malay quarter of Cape Town. The incessant thudding of the drums, the crowded room, red fezzes and bright clothes, clatter of Kamparangs in the stone courtyard, the incense and the beat of tambourines – all these influences helped to sway the judgment in favour of a miracle.

The performers stabbed at their stomachs with sharp skewers, keeping time with the music. They slashed at their arms with swords without a drop of blood flowing. One man passed skewers through his ears and the fleshy parts of his throat, shoulders and cheeks.

But the doctor who accompanied me to the Khalifa saw no magic in this brilliant display. Neither did I. Nor did the elderly Hadji who sat next to me, telling (when the music died down) of his many visits to Mecca.

This old Malay, in fact, compared the show with a football match. The people, he declared, came there to hear the music and see the handsome young performers—they were not greatly excited about the sword slashing. There was far more music than mutilation.

Nothing was done that night that I had not previously seen performed on the music-hall stage by a Russian artist. The Russian, in fact, was more daring than the Malays, for he bit pieces out of beer glasses and crunched them up in his mouth.

The Malays, by long practice, have learnt to give an appearance of bringing the swords down on their arms without really putting any force into the blows at the moment of contact. There is a simple anatomical explanation of the skewering business – otherwise women would not be able to wear ear rings.

It is hinted that further and deeper mysteries are presented after the European guests have left the Khalifa. I see no reason to accept this legend as fact – no showman in the world clears out part of his audience just before the most striking scene in his entertainment.

Malay “magic” assumes a hundred different forms. But whether a house is being pelted with stones or a farmer’s draught animals are acting strangely there is no more magic in the affair than any amateur conjurer uses when he snatches an unexpected rabbit out of a hat. The Malay’s lizard is really a much less mysterious creature than the rabbit, for it is smaller and easier to palm. Like the stage illusionist, the Malay does not explain how his tricks are done. “It’s fun to be fooled – but it’s more fun to know,” says an American cigarette advertisement.

But it is not fun to be fooled by a Malay “doctor.” I am afraid there will be patients to call him in as long as there are people who will not light three cigarettes with one match.

CHAPTER 20

ISLAND TREASURE

SUNKEN gold and buried hoards are worth seeking nowadays, with gold far above its normal value. This is the time to hear a dying sailor's tale of wealth; to stare again at that old parchment map with its fascinating clues; to set out with the latest metal-divining instruments in quest of fabulous riches; to solve the mysteries of long-lost treasure on the coasts and islands and in the waters of Africa.

Nevertheless, it is possible to hear too much about some of the famous treasures. I find the stories of small, little known hoards more fascinating than the legends of Cocos and Tobermory, the frigate *Lutine*, the wrecked galleons of the West Indies and all the good old private yarns which have had their day and become monotonous through repetition. The *Emden's* money, for example, is only a

tiny treasure compared with the loot of buccaneers; but it has the ring of truth, it is there beneath the Indian Ocean, and its story has, I believe, never been told before.

Everyone remembers the German raiding cruiser *Emden* and her last gallant fight with the *Sydney* which ended, almost inevitably, with the defeat of the shell-ridden *Emden* on the coral reefs of Keeling Island in the Cocos group. This Cocos should not be confused with the Cocos in the Pacific, where Sir Malcolm Campbell and so many others have sought the gold ornaments and precious stones hidden there by scoundrels like Davis and Bonito. Keeling Island, where the steel bones of the *Emden* still lie, stands by itself some miles to the north of the other Cocos islets in the Indian Ocean – a lone, uninhabited island, rarely visited, never appearing in the day's news.

In Cape Town recently I met a German survivor of that great sea-fight. He was Herr F. Locham, cook on board the *Emden*, and still without a scratch when Captain von Muller beached the ship on Keeling Island. Locham was engaged in a strange duty during that dramatic phase of the struggle. Capture seemed certain; so Locham and others were instructed to throw overboard the store of golden sovereigns carried by the *Emden* as ship's money. "Box after box was brought up and flung into the sea," Locham told me. Apart from the gold pieces in German currency which the *Emden* possessed as a matter of routine, there were thousands of sovereigns and other gold coins taken, fairly enough, from the merchant steamers she had captured and sunk.

Herr Locham could not tell me how much gold went over the side that day; for, as he pointed out, the cruiser was ablaze, her decks littered with the dying and the dead,

the *Sydney* was still raking her with a pitiless fire and it was no time for counting money. He knew there was a good deal of gold, for it took them some time to dispose of it. Sufficient was kept to give the survivors their naval pay – an act which the *Sydney's* captain courteously allowed. The rest still lies scattered over the shallow coral floor of the Indian Ocean off Keeling Island. Only a small fortune, perhaps, but solid enough and, I imagine, one which would be fairly easy to recover.

2

If the *Emden* treasure alone does not seem to justify fitting out an expedition, there are many other romantic little hoards in African seas. When I was in Mauritius some years ago, a syndicate was being formed to uncover the wealth of the French privateer Surcouf – a rascal who attacked many an East Indiaman in his day. Surcouf used Port Louis as his base and, it is said,

shared his loot with the Governor of Mauritius. On one occasion, after a particularly rich haul, they quarrelled over the spoils; whereupon Surcouf sailed away in a rage and buried the treasure in a cave on the coast of Mauritius.

Following the irritating pirate custom, Surcouf died without leaving any clear instructions about the treasure to his successors. Shortly after the Great War, however, papers containing clues were reported to have been found on the island. Treasure hunters immediately set to work. The first clue led to a lonely stretch of coast – Mauritius is a large island – where a landing might have been made unobserved. There was a narrow valley in the line of jungle-clad cliffs; and it needed little imagination to picture the pig-tailed crew tramping inland from the beach to bury their loot. Finally the hunters discovered two large stones mentioned in the clues as the keys to the treasure – and one stone

showed faint markings such as Surcouf's men might have made.

All that remained, apparently, was to take the usual compass bearings, the required number of paces, and so reveal the treasure. At this point, however, the expedition lost the scent. There was no cave in that tangle of tropical bush, though days were spent in the search for an opening. Signs of landslides there were in plenty; and a fresh syndicate, having obtained capital in England, tackled the treasure in the modern manner. Electric divining instruments arrived, the pointers quivered, deep shafts were dug. Solid rock did not deter these eager treasure hunters. Twenty, thirty, fifty feet down they went without a vestige of success. At another spot the face of the cliff was bored with chisel and crowbar, and a cave laid bare. There was nothing in it. But Mauritius is a large island, as I have said, and when another chart is found Surcouf's treasure will be sought again.

“L’argent! L’argent!”

Thus a dying Portuguese, pointing to the East, tried to call attention to a hidden store of money when the first French settlers set foot on the island of Rodriguez, near Mauritius. The bones of his companions were found on the northern beach.

Cable men and their families know Rodriguez, but not many other travellers reach these volcanic shores. A queer little place with its bays and creeks marked on the chart with names like Tamarind and Grenade, Malagache, Topaze – and also a Cape Trou d’Argent. You will find scores of islanders over ninety years of age, and a few centenarians. Cyclones destroy the crops; and centuries ago the Dutch abandoned the place because of rats or monkeys – no one knows which. Rodriguez is peaceful enough today, except when the islanders drink too much

of their own rum. But the air of mystery lingers – the dying Portuguese took his secret to the grave with him. Who was this man – who were his companions? Pirates? The story and the money are lost. Maragon, the old settler who left this fragment on record, could tell nothing more; and now he and his wife, too, are buried on the hill called Demoiselle.

There are traces of an Arab occupation of Rodriguez, and Arab pirates were known to have visited the island during the sixteenth century – probably before the supposed discovery by the Portuguese navigator Pereira. Dutch seamen called at Rodriguez, inscribed their names on trees, replenished their hen-coops with tortoises and sailed away. Privateers preying on the rich sea lanes of the Indian Ocean were frequent visitors. Rodriguez is the sort of island where

treasure should lie buried, and many believe that it has been buried there.

In 1920 a Mauritian arrived at the island, purchased outright the western section of a valley at English Bay, and excavated a great deal of soil. He dug for more than three years. Everyone on the island knew that he was digging for treasure. But he was a silent man, this steadfast Mauritian, and he would say nothing more than "The marks seem to point to it." He left Rodriguez in 1923, and if he took anything valuable with him, no one on the island knew what it was.

It is not surprising that nearly every one of the scores of Indian Ocean isles should have its treasure legend. Vessels carrying the riches of the East sailed among those isles for centuries, were lost on them, or looted by pirates. There must be fact, as well as fancy, in the tales that one hears

along the Port Louis water-front or in the Club at Mahe in the Seychelles.

The Seychelles, indeed, are a promising field for an expedition; and I cannot imagine a more pleasant spot in the world for a treasure hunt than those lazy isles of pretty Creole girls, blue lagoons and sunshine. In the Seychelles it is the treasure of the pirate Houdoul they seek – a scoundrel who plied his sinister trade along the Indian Ocean sea-tracks just a hundred years ago. Some say the treasure was buried with him, in his tomb on Mahe. It was certainly buried; but we may be permitted to doubt whether the islanders of 1835 would have allowed a pirate hoard to vanish for all time when its guardian was no longer to be feared!

Why do we never hear of the *Doddington* treasure nowadays? The story has the

same fascination as the more celebrated narrative of the *Grosvenor*. An East India Company's ship, the *Doddington*, sailed from England with four others of the fleet in April, 1855, and rounded the Cape after a voyage of seven weeks. On July 17th, however, she struck the rock now named after her in the Bird Island group off Algoa Bay. Only twenty-two seamen and passengers survived out of a ship's company of two hundred and seventy, all told. Some provisions were washed ashore – a firkin of butter, biscuits, salt meat and six casks of water. The annual invasion of penguins and gannets occurred shortly after the wreck; so that with eggs and fish, there was no risk of starvation.

The seamen of the party, realising that there was little hope of rescue, started building a boat, which they called the *Happy Deliverance*. Seven months, it took them to build, and they were not sorry to

set sail for the north'ard and see the wretched island of birds vanishing astern.

Now it is obvious that to build a boat capable – as it turned out – of reaching Delagoa Bay, the seamen must have had access to tools and material on board the wrecked *Doddington*. It was also natural that these men should have taken anything else of value and easily transportable. Actually it is on record that they found the *Doddington's* money chests and landed them on the island. This was not merely ship's money – the boxes also contained valuables belonging to the passengers, and possibly cash for the Company's various enterprises in the East.

From now on the fate of this treasure is not so clear. It is fairly certain that one chest was broken open and the contents distributed among the survivors. And it is thought that before the long and perilous voyage in the open boat was embarked

upon, the rest of the treasure was hidden. It may have been buried on the island; quite possibly it was taken across to the mainland and hidden there.

At all events a sailor, who had arrived at Delagoa Bay with the rest of the party, turned up in Cape Town in 1757 and declared that a great treasure awaited recovery in a cave at Woody Cape, not far from the scene of the wreck. A Corporal van Bengel, employed by the Dutch East India Company, decided that the story was worth investigating and devoted his savings to the venture. He secured a passage to Algoa Bay in the *Zwaartvisch*; then bribed three sailors to row him in one of the ship's boats to Woody Cape. The boat was swamped in the surf and only van Bengel reached the shore alive.

Near the beach he discovered a small grotto. A rusty blunderbuss and a broken

cutlass were lying inside; but no traces of treasure. Whether van Bengel had found the right cave it is impossible to say. He tramped back miserably to the Cape and ended his days in an asylum. A second expedition, in which van Bengel did not take part, was no more fortunate. If the *Doddington* really carried rich treasure, the bulk of it must be there to this day.

5

Look at the African chart (maps do not always help) between Madeira and the Canaries, and you will find the Salvage Islands. Three desolate sand-banks with small hills – sighted by thousands of liner passengers who know nothing of the money and the toil devoted at various times to the quest for treasure on those lonely isles. Some say that Captain Kidd buried it on Salvage Grande, others that the lost hoard lies on Gran' Piton or the third of the group, Little Piton. There is a

story that in 1804 a Spanish merchantman sailed from Cadiz with a cargo of silver ingots, and that the crew murdered the officers near the Salvages and left the treasure snugly hidden on an island beach. The atmosphere of old villainy clusters thickly round these ocean outposts. But treasure is treasure, and either Kidd's gold or Spanish silver would make a pleasant find.

Imagine, then, that your schooner has anchored off Salvage Grande. The landing party, with their spades and picks, are clambering into the boats. There is little fear of being disturbed, for the group is uninhabited and the fishermen who used to arrive every year to collect orchilla come no longer.

Landing is easy in the cove on the south side. Immediately you are among the birds – a colony of Shearwaters millions strong, large birds with fat chicks, nesting among

the rocks. There is an abandoned hut on the beach; but waste no time there, climb the steep path to the island plateau, where you will find wells and fresh water.

To the west of the wells, the sandy, scrub-covered land is all pock-marked and scarred by treasure hunters. Twice last century the British Government was sufficiently impressed by these tales to join in the search. This is your field of adventure, and if you are unlucky there are two more islands to visit.

Hopes of a great treasure discovery on these islands are based on the fact that Captain Kidd is known to have called at the Salvages, and probably used them as a convenient point from which to raid the Atlantic shipping. The geographical position of the islands supports this deduction. Kidd's treasure, however, was never found – he went to the gallows without revealing the hiding-place.

I am bound to add the warning given to me in Madeira once by a Portuguese who knew the Salvages and who seemed to know something about the treasure. “El corsero (Kidd) left his money there on Salvage Grande,” said the Portuguese. “But you must ask those Spanish fishermen, the Canarios, what happened to it. They found it and carried it off long ago.”

CHAPTER 21

AFRICA'S RIVER OF MYSTERY

WITHIN the hot frontiers of the Cape North-west you will find the mystery that still lingers in civilised South Africa. Great Bushmanland, Kenhardt, Gordonias – these are the lands of the canvas water-bag, the trek-boer, the dust-devil and the Groot Rivier. Here men still die of thirst when they lose their way; and so you will see a water-bag caked with mud lashed to every motor-car.

Rushing by night across the brown face of this territory to the Orange River floods recently I entered the gateway of adventure and gathered memories of men and places I shall never forget. Day after day, between dusty Kenhardt and half-submerged Kakamas, remote Bladgrond and white Pella, I saw a fascinating land that few South Africans outside its borders know. The whole scene shimmers like a mirage

through the intense dry heat under a raking sun.

But the deepest impression of all is not of trek-wagon or sand dune. It is the friendliness of the people. Judged by other standards, perhaps, some of them might rank as tough citizens. Yet even such notorious freebooters as “Scotty” Smith and Ferreira have left a tradition of kindness and good fellowship with those who knew them well. The generosity of the wide spaces of the Cape North-west is indeed something to be remembered.

This is the country for all who hate tight collars and the sham of cities. Truly a man can raise a thirst there – aye, and quench it – without a neighbour raising an eyebrow.

Ask a friend in Upington to have a drink. The barman fills the beer glasses. A nod, a smile, a quick movement of the sun-browned right arm, and your friend's long glass is empty. After a few days of

motoring over incredible roads and through deep sand, you will find your own glass finished at a gulp. You have learnt the typical North-west swing of the arm. You will not sip beer again within those hard frontiers.

There are middle-aged men in Kenhardt who recall the hunting party which went out one day and shot a thousand springbok. After that they invaded the hotel and drank a thousand bottles of beer. A deplorable story perhaps but that is the North-west. Most of the springbok and all the Bushmen have passed on, over the Orange River, into the Kalahari. The grand thirst, on both sides of the river, remains.

My map of the Cape North-west, stained with the brown dust of two thousand miles, is open before me. But I need no reminder of the wonderful people who helped me along the way.

Once at sundown I sat under the vines on the stoep of a storekeeper who had taken part in every border war, raid and skirmish for thirty years. You might not have thought of him as an officer of field rank as he sat there in shirtsleeves and braces, pouring the cool water into the brandy tots. But in South Africa military skill is not found only beneath brass hats.

Even the priests in these parts are different. Father Wulf, of Pella, forty-nine years there, building a church with his own hands, making a green, refreshing settlement in the desert of Bushmanland, inspiring the Hottentots with something of his own faith in humanity. I have met missionaries in many parts of Africa and heard officials and traders criticise them; but there was never an unfriendly word about the efforts of the Roman Catholics. They do not preach the Brotherhood of Man to bewildered savages – these Roman

Catholics work, and their converts work, too.

Another vision of North-west hospitality in an oasis after sixty miles of desert motoring. Heaven alone knows how many travellers Carl Weidner, the author-farmer, of Goodhouse, has helped over the great red dune of Kooisabees. The modern car, of course, rushes the sand in second gear and comes through triumphantly. But only a little while ago a native who had died of thirst was found close to the Goodhouse road.

Carl Weidner gave us wild goose for dinner that night, and some of his own exquisite grapes. I wonder how many of Weidner's countless guests pause to think how astounding it is to find such a place of comfort and culture in the midst of this parched wilderness. Thirty years ago farmers in the North-west were riding for their lives before murderous bands of

Hottentot raiders. The sons of the most dangerous Hottentot leader are now working peacefully for Weidner of Goodhouse.

The police of the North-west were once known as the Frontier Mounted Police. To them fell the task of clearing the Koranna bandits out of the water jungles of the Orange River. Their outposts at the drifts were the first signs of civilisation along the northern border of the Cape. These men, and the famous Cape Mounted Police who followed them, knew the almost inaccessible loops of the great river long before anyone dreamt of the modern irrigation settlements that have cost millions of pounds and will cost millions more.

Yet I do not think the ghosts of the old troopers who fell in that desert need shake their heads sadly (after the fashion of old soldiers) over the South African Police

along the river today. I spent an evening talking to a young sergeant – he still looked young, though he had been thereabouts since 1916 – and the talk ranged from Bushman to baboons.

“There is no hope of catching a Bushman unless he is gorged with meat – or unless you can find another Bushman to track him,” declared the sergeant. “Did you know that bows and arrows have been declared illegal weapons? There is no known antidote for arrow poison, and it is not so long ago that a Bushman shot a magistrate in South West Africa. The Germans classed the Bushmen as vermin, along with leopards and baboons. I know a white woman living on a lonely farm who has shot any number of Bushmen. Of course, it is all very different today – though the Court might take a lenient view if the Bushmen had given some provocation.”

There was a station-master with a university degree in science. He found time, amid the babel of stranded passengers, to shout Press telegrams over a faulty railway telephone line – and get them through. A ganger gave us meals and beds on his stoep; we were dropping with exhaustion and even the lightning could not keep us awake. Ah, the railwaymen of the out-stations – those are the places to seek the system managers of the future. Warm memories, indeed, along some of the hottest roads in the world. North-west roads, lined with bushman grass – the “twaas grass” that crackles in the wind. Roads dominated by strange kopjes where, in the caves, bushmen once lived. Aching roads that stretch away in full view ten, twenty, thirty miles, like the long road to Pofadder. Roads that cross huge pans like the Verneuk Pan I once came to know so well; mud pans, salt pans and dried-up vleis where the speedometer needle creeps

up and the tyres hum to the tune of sixty miles an hour.

High speeds fit the mood of the North-west, where distances and everything else are on the grand scale. There are farms measured in hundreds of thousands of acres; too small in times of drought. A dust storm in the North-west does not merely blow sand into your eyes – it comes in whirling masses that shut out the sun for fifteen minutes, while in the villages the lamps are lit.

Yes, there is nothing mean about the North-west. The Great Falls of the Orange River – the sinister Aughrabies – are higher than Niagara or the Victoria Falls. And is there not a legendary Great Snake in the river? You may not believe in monsters, but you cannot fail to be impressed by the belief of everyone along the river regarding this Great Snake. Some say that schools of otters, strung out on the

surface of the water, have given rise to the legend. I can see no reason why there should not be a giant python somewhere in the unsurveyed reaches. The Orange River is 1,200 miles long. It cuts through the least-known territory in the Union. There is nothing in the geography of South Africa more wonderful than this river, and it must still hold many secrets.

The air of the North-west is of crystal quality, with a crispness that makes the summer heat bearable. You can work after lunch in the North-west, with the shaded thermometer registering 107 degrees and more.

Everyone sleeps in the open air in summer. At Kenhardt the midnight motorist must beware – beds are to be found not only on the stoeps, but almost in the middle of the road. One early morning at Kakamas I left my room to find the bath-room in the orchard outside. Under each orange tree

there was a bed and a girl asleep – a pretty sight which explains, perhaps, some of all this enthusiasm of mine for the Cape North-west.

I did like the freedom of the North-west. My city clothes feel strange after the khaki shirt and shorts in which a man may dine without comment at the best hotels from Upington to Calvinia. The *hors-d'œuvres* and the iced wine tasted all the better because I had no stiff shirt to worry me.

And so, with the cheerful North-west swing, I raise my glass to the unshaven men who are building up something for which all South Africa may one day be grateful. The Cape North-west !

2

Only from hearsay, from Bushmen tales and camp-fire yarns, can we gather the wild story of the Orange River and the

strange part of South Africa through which it passes. Tempting scraps of lore and legend-little more do we know.

Along nearly all the world's great waterways it is possible to search the records of centuries, note the floods of the past and predict with some certainty how often the torrents of the future may be expected. But the Orange River has a past darker than her own muddy waters. The "Groot Rivier" of the voortrekkers is a river of mystery.

The time is coming when train-loads of tourists will go north from Cape Town every year to see the Orange River, the islands, the Great Falls and the Kalahari. Yet it was only in 1760 that the first white man, Jacobus Coetsee, saw and crossed the Orange. An elephant hunter was this Coetsee, and the tale of discovery he told brought the explorers, Colonel Gordon and Lieutenant Paterson, to eat hippo

meat on the river banks seventeen years later. From the early years right down to the end of last century, however, the long wagon-trek to the Orange was a difficult and dangerous undertaking. The yarns they told round the outspan fires in Bushmanland in those days were of encounters with wild animals and hostile savages. They were true yarns.

When was the greatest Orange River flood of all? I asked old men in many a settlement that question during the recent floods. One Kakamas farmer recalled the torrent of 1897 – the pioneers had arrived, but the water did not harm them for they had not yet started work. That is about as far as living memory goes – that is to say, along the river below Upington.

Nevertheless it is probable that the greatest flood during the past five hundred years occurred in 1790, when seeds of the “Kurru” thorn tree – previously unknown

on the banks of the lower Orange – were brought down. This may be deduced from a conversation with Cornelis Kok, the Griqua chief, left on record by the missionary Campbell. The trees grew far up on the banks – a fairly reliable guide to what must have been a terrifying deluge.

By such rough guesswork, based on well-known floods further south near Colesberg or at Aliwal, the heights of other Orange River floods have been estimated. There is a Hottentot tradition that in 1840 the river was flooded for nearly five months – a state of affairs which would certainly not be relished by the present settlers. It is clear that in 1849, and again in 1861, there were serious floods. A ghastly drought followed the torrent of 1861, and a wagon known to have been lost while crossing a drift thirty years previously was found in the dry river bed. The following year a low river was succeeded by a sudden rush of

water that ran, as the Hottentots said, "like a great sea."

Settlers began the cultivation of the rich Orange River silt, as I have said, just before the end of the last century. For hundreds of miles, however, the course of the river remained unmapped and unknown. It was not until 1912 that Mr. A. D. Lewis, Director of Irrigation, made a hard trek from Ramans Drift down to the mouth in twelve days. He visited Hottentot camps where few white men had ever been seen before, and noted the gluttony of these remote people. They would eat a goat at a sitting. They begged for tobacco, and smoked feverishly until their supplies vanished. Very little scientific information about the lower reaches of the river has been gathered since the rapid survey made by Mr. Lewis.

Only when the dramas of a heavy flood are related in the newspapers do many people

in South Africa become aware of the Orange River islands. No one, as far as I know, has ever counted these long, bushy obstructions in the river bed. Every flood sees islands torn apart, new islands formed. Cannon Island, for example, was eleven miles long; it has been rent asunder, much of the best soil washed away, and has now become a series of smaller islands. A thousand people who seized Cannon Island and made a flourishing settlement there will have to find new land elsewhere.

And so it is impossible to say how many isles exist in the weird loops of the Orange. There must be hundreds. About twenty miles below Upington, where the river opens out into a great bowl, the islands are scattered generously like germs seen through a microscope. Here, too, is an island with a name which gives a vivid impression of this water jungle. Drakenbosch Island, they call it; and it is not hard to imagine a dragon prowling in

that tangle of wild olives and willows, mimosa, zwartbosch, ebony and thorn.

No wonder the brave little commandos of farmers found it so difficult to punish the Hottentot and Koranna raiders, who made their strongholds in those river islands for a hundred years. The bush made a secure hiding-place for stolen cattle. White renegades, criminals from the Cape, joined the marauding bands which used the islands as their base.

German settlers to the north of the Orange were raided, too-men, women and children murdered in the sudden raids by the river bandits on isolated farms. Organised military campaigns cleared the river at last. You may still find rusty rifles, food tins and skeletons in the wild country of the lower river – relics of the long guerrilla war. Not until 1906 was the last robber chief captured.

Both sides of the river were British territory, even when the Germans ruled South West Africa. The German outposts, however, were built close to the stream; and the soldiers grew fruit, fished in the river, and made pets of monkeys and baboons. Lonely they were, but it must have been a happy change from life in barracks. Some of the international frontier signs, with “British Territory” on one side and “Deutsches Schutzgebiet” on the other, still stand in remote fastness’s of the river – few white men, apart from policemen and prospectors, have seen them since they were erected by the boundary commission years ago.

Upington, chief town of the vast district of Gordonia, is the gateway both to the river and the Kalahari desert. Westwards from Upington, all the way to the Great Falls, the banks are intensely cultivated. It is said that the farms along this great frontage were laid out by allowing each

settler to ride for half an hour along the river, and then for two and a half hours straight inland. A glance at the irrigation, map certainly shows a line of long, narrow farms; though many have been subdivided since those spacious days.

The contrast between the green vineyards, water-wheels and shady cottages of the river, and the sheer desert to be found on the same farm, is often startling. A few minutes after leaving the greenery of Kakamas you enter a veritable Death Valley where only the grim Kokerboom grows.

Until the Great War brought the railway across the river for the attack on German South West Africa, the town of Upington was one of the most isolated places in South Africa. There was often a shortage of small change, and German marks and pfennigs circulated more freely than British silver. Even now there must be

many German gold coins stowed away in the farmhouses of the district.

Upington is a place with a real background of adventure; and some of the desert-stained men who stride into the bars there are real figures of romance. You hear of desert mysteries at first-hand among those khaki groups at sundown. The legend of the lost city of Kalahari becomes alive; diamonds, it seems, are to be had in hundreds for the picking; and lions mean no more than rabbits to these desert wanderers.

One night the talk was of the Molopo, a dry river invaded long ago by sand dunes – but once a mighty stream that drained the Kalahari. Some years ago, after terrific rains, the Molopo came down in flood. It left the old channel, formed a lake and disappeared near the German border at the place called Abiquas Puts. Fish were found in thousands in this lake. The farmers

carted loads away, but huge shoals were left to rot when the lake evaporated. Now what was the origin of those fish?

They find sea-shells in the dry Kalahari, too, and traces of long-vanished forests. In the hot, red sands of the Kalahari and the brown waters of the Orange there are riddles we cannot answer.

3

South of the Orange River, south for hundreds of miles to the mud houses of Brandvlei and the white buildings of Calvinia, stretches the wilderness of Bushmanland.

A great hush rested over these plains and kopjes half a century ago. The land was unoccupied then, save by the wandering trek-boer. It is lonely country still, even though you may see a telegraph line, a fence, a store or a farmhouse here and there.

Bushmanland is still the territory of the trek-boer, a type you will find in no other part of South Africa. Across the wide spaces, like sails on a hot, brown ocean, move the wagons of these restless people. To see them as I did on those distant, burning roads, is to see again the voor-trekkers of old.

These wagon folk hear little of the feverish world beyond the Kamiesberg and the Hantam Mountains. They have their Bibles, but no radio sets. Their children are born and brought up under the canvas wagon tents; many of them have never seen a town. The fluctuations of money, the sensations of the headlines, fashions – all these things pass them by. At the farm called Bladgrond, in the heart of Bushmanland, I met a group of women wearing the loose print dresses and bright “kappies” of last century. Fine complexions they all had, too, in this land of intense, dry heat.

In the past, few trek-boers owned land. Nowadays, when Crown lands have shrunk and pasturage must be paid for with sheep, most of them have a piece of veld somewhere on the borders of Bushmanland. Often for two years at a time, however, a man in this country is compelled to abandon his drought-stricken farm and set out on the endless quest for grass. I doubt whether there is a farm in Bushmanland large enough to support its sheep when the summer rains fail.

So the trekkers are nomads by compulsion and by instinct. You find them in the most desolate places, always a mile or two ahead of their flocks, always inquiring what grazing they may expect further along the road. A hundred disappointments do not seem to break their spirit – the distance is always alluring.

I remember a wagon outspanned beside the sand-choked Goodhouse road, in a waterless valley of stark, blinding heat. There were two little girls playing with the lambs; a woman in the heavily loaded wagon; three men searching the horizon for signs of moisture. They asked for water; we gave them the canvas bag and some melons. Most of their sheep had perished. They were trekking on, still full of hope.

In the good times, when summer thunderstorms fill the pans and the grass rustles high and yellow in the wind, the trek-boer's life is not an unpleasant one. Few Orange River settlers, with their rich irrigated gardens, can hope to increase their capital so quickly as the owner of thousands of sheep. But the winters, when the grass turns black and then disappears – each winter is an ordeal. At all times the rainfall is freakish. I have passed within a few hours' motoring in Bushmanland

from gay stretches of flowers to desert belts where no rain, it seemed, had refreshed the earth for years.

Yes, the long winters mean torture in Bushmanland. Then the trek-boer must dig in shallow depressions where water is sometimes retained by the underlying rock. Cup by cup the salty water is scooped out – donkeys, mules, sheep in pitiful anticipation waiting for their share.

The trek-boer sometimes stakes his own life, and the lives of all in the wagon, on his ability to find the hidden water. A broken wheel, straying donkeys – such things may spell death in the worst parts of Bushmanland. In the northern areas the red dunes of the Kalahari have crept across the river; and in this fine, dry sand the mummified bodies of horses and men, too, have been found.

When all goes well the day starts with prayers and coffee. Bread is a luxury –

there are boer biscuits in the wagon. Seldom is there a shortage of fresh meat, for one lamb will not be missed from the flock. The hen coop which you see swinging from every wagon supplies eggs. But the trek-boers lack fruit and fresh vegetables. The water they drink is so brackish that few city people could swallow it unless they were very thirsty. A few of those marvellous mixtures known as “old Dutch medicines” and a still more wonderful physique – make the trek-boer independent of doctors. One hesitates to think of serious illness in the remote places where the trek-boers spend their lives.

No official notice of the Bushmanland trek-boers was taken until 1891, when Mr. W. C. Scully, the South African author (then a magistrate), was sent out to compile a census. At that time the plains were alive with millions of springbok; during a recent tour I saw only one.

Every year, in early winter, the springbok migrated from east to west across Bushmanland. It must have been one of the greatest sights in Africa – this stampede of millions that raised a dust cloud as far as the eye could see and left the whole surface of the country torn up by their hoofs.

Naturalists cannot explain this strange herd instinct with any certainty. It has been suggested that the buck were anxious to reach the vegetation on the slopes of the western mountains; the fawns were born in early winter, and the does would require green food.

Many years ago, soon after the first trek-boers arrived, the most startling migration of all occurred. The springbok hordes appeared to have been gripped by a devastating thirst. They broke across the boundaries of Bushmanland and dashed clear through the coastal regions of

Namaqualand to the sea. A springbok usually drinks nothing. But there, on the white sands, these millions drank salt water until they perished, so that the beaches were piled high with skeletons.

Like the migration and suicide of the rats of Norway, this is fact, not fiction – but on a more reckless and magnificent scale. It can never happen again.

The springbok stampede caused such havoc on the farms of the Bushmanland border that the Cape Government issued rifles and ammunition for the farmers to protect their crops. Then the migration became a massacre. Even the young boys were armed. One shot fired into that dense herd brought down three buck. Old flintlocks barked side by side with Martinis. Wagon after wagon returned creaking under the weight of the kill.

Those were busy nights for the women who made the biltong, with thousands of buck to

split, remove the bones, cut into strips, salt and dry. Today they must shoot the great praauw, the wild bustard from the Kalahari, when they wish to make biltong.

Bushmanland often seems lifeless; but all manner of queer creatures shelter underground by day, waiting for sundown. Near the river the tarantulas will drive a man from his camp-fire. There are scorpions under every rock, and snakes that dare not crawl in the burning sun. Meerkats stand erect, then hurry into their holes as a motor-car passes. Leopards and jackals stalk their prey in the krantzes; and above, the lammervanger awaits a share of the offal.

The remains of more ancient creatures than any of these have been discovered in Bushmanland – nothing less, indeed, than the bones of a dinosaur. They were first noticed by a Mr. Coetzee while sinking a well on the farm Kangnas, in a valley leading to the Orange River. Dr. Rogers

took charge of the excavation and brought a calcified tooth, a femora, hind leg bones and fragments of vertebrae to the surface. There must be many more such relics of cretaceous times in the buried valley of Bushmanland.

All the birds and beasts, even the snakes and scorpions, were hunted by the wizened little men who gave Bushmanland their name. Their skulls are to be found under the sand in every cave – I saw a row of them, and many arrow heads, pottery and bone hunting-knives collected by a store-keeper who felt the magic of this vanished race.

At the water-holes in Bushmanland you will see grooves in the rocks where the Bushmen sharpened their weapons. Buried in the sands are the ostrich eggs they filled with water long ago; but these secret places, marked with Bushman signs, we may find only by chance. There was a death penalty then for the

Bushman who stole the precious water belonging to another clan.

Thus Bushmen and springbok have departed – both so destructive that they could not live in the same country as the white man. The great solitude has been claimed by the trek-boer. I do not envy him; not even when the rains have come and the face of a suffering land is transformed.

But I should like to see a dawn again in Bushmanland, the air so fresh and clear that purple mountains fifty miles away seem close at hand.

One knows hunger and thirst on the aching roads of Bushmanland and the enjoyment of satisfying them at the end of a long day's run. Ah, the calm nights of Bushmanland when the temperature outside calls for nothing more than a sheet. I hope to see the lightning on the white walls of Pofadder – the old meeting

place of the trek-boers – again one day. The smell of rain-lashed earth, the thin music of a Hottentot ramkee, the empty circle of veld under the blue bowl of the sky ... there is peace in Bushmanland.

CHAPTER 22

THE COVERED WAGON

WILL the wagon ever vanish from the South African veld? Even now, almost a century after the Great Trek, the silvery call of the wagon driver to his team has not been drowned by the shriek of railway whistles or the drone of motor-cars. Indeed, I found new life in one of the old, surviving wagon yards at Kingwilliams-town recently – that Cape border town which was once the most flourishing centre of a trade as romantic as ship-building.

“They call it a dying trade,” the builder told me cheerfully. “But motor-trucks have not been able to move the mealie crop where the roads are bad, so the farmers still want wagons. Five wagons a week we are turning out now – the demand is approaching the boom days of the Boer War, when we made nine or ten wagons a week. And they are cheaper today – a

motor-truck costs six times as much as a wagon. A good ironwood wagon may last fifty years. For crops and cargoes that do not need rapid transport, the wagon is hard to beat.”

Truly the wagon deserves its place in the Union’s coat-of-arms. Wagons, built according to the medieval Netherlands pattern, carried the first Dutch explorers northwards from the shores of Table Bay into hot deserts in search of the golden city of Vigiti Magna. The first tracks towards every distant frontier were made by the wheels of roving wagons. Wars could not have been fought without them, or towns born. The brave story of the covered wagon is the story of South Africa. Pioneers lived in their wagons year after year.

The leisurely wagon appears as a “new model” only about once in a century. Those I saw at Kingwilliamstown were

not very different from the wagons of the 1820 Settlers or the Voortrekkers, though the old adventurers used wooden axles and *riemskoens* instead of the modern brakes. (It was not until about 1860 that chains and shoes were abandoned in favour of brakes acting on the wheels; and the ring to which the chain was shackled is still fitted to every wagon built today.) Many farmers rightly insist on the same hand-painted, flowered decorations on wheels and sides – a design that must be more than a hundred years old.

Spokes are now made by machinery – it is difficult to find a man capable of making them by hand. The wheelwright is a craftsman with hereditary skill. A clever carpenter would soon discover his limitations when he came to assemble a wheel. The strain must be evenly distributed. The experienced eye achieves more than the rule, so that when the tyre is put on, the contraction gives just the right

effect. A wheelwright, in fact, sees the wheel as a whole while he builds it; and that is not an art to be learnt in a day. If that art is ever lost through the death of the last wheelwright, there will be no more wagons.

Ordinary farm wagons of the well-known “Grahamstown” type, drawn by sixteen oxen and carrying loads up to five tons, are most frequently in demand. This was the wagon used on the great trail of adventure from Port Elizabeth to Kimberley in the early diamond days, and then on the trek to the Rand when gold was discovered. But the Kingwilliamstown yard I visited has carried out many interesting special orders. One huge tented wagon was built for a Bechuanaland Chief and was intended for journeys in state across the Kalahari. It had large water tanks fitted beneath the floor, and the decorations were gorgeous. Then there are “Sea” wagons, veritable houses on

wheels designed by their owners – Border farmers who use them for holiday trips to the wild coasts where there are no hotels. Traders in the native territories of the Transkei were once important customers. The Forest Department still orders wagons of the *kort krink* type; they are built to turn round in the small spaces of the forest. Orders have been cabled to Kingwilliamstown from New York – an American wanted shooting safari wagons in a hurry – and wagons have been sent as far afield as the Belgian Congo, Kenya and South West Africa. Some of the most luxurious wagons cost £200 or more. You can purchase a new wagon today for £75; last century the same wagon would have cost £120, before new machinery cheapened the cost of production.

From *disselboom* to *achter stel*, the wagon has more parts than you might imagine. The strong belly plank rests on the two great axles with their four strong wheels,

the *voor wielen* being smaller than the hind ones. Securely fastened to the *disselboom* is the drawing gear, or *trekgoed*. Great care is taken in assembling the front carriage; the tongue must be set correctly into the bed of the axle so that the draught is equally distributed on each wheel. The projecting belly plank serves as a foot-rest for the driver. It is no exaggeration to say that thousands of lives have been lost in South Africa through men jumping for this projection, missing it and falling under the wheels. A step has now been added to minimise this danger.

Early wagons had boughs bent and lashed together in a framework for the covering of painted canvas. There were always a *voor kist* (front box) and *achter kist* for goods, while small boxes on each side held reins, strops and gear for the yokes and oxen. The men slept in tents fixed alongside the wagon. The women and children placed their mattresses on the

katel – a square of wood with leather thongs.

In canvas bags or *jager-zakken*, fastened inside the wagon, were stowed the powder horns, bullet pouches and the formidable, long Boer guns called *roers*. The very mention of them recalls those moments of high courage when the women loaded while their men fired desperately into the massed ranks of the attacking Zulu impi's.

Water-vaatjes swung from hooks beneath the wagon, with the cooking-pots, grid-irons and tar-pot for greasing the axles. Coffee and sausages, bread, biscuits and ashcakes, meat for *carbonaatjes* (grilled chops) – that was the wagon's usual larder. With this equipment thousands embarked on journeys into the unknown. I thought of the hardships when I met the Angola trekkers returning from Portuguese territory to their own people in South West Africa six years ago. Their northward trek

across the Kalahari in the 1870's was at once a magnificent and a tragic effort – an ordeal of thirst and hunger and battles with hostile natives. Many graves were left along that desert trail. When the descendants of this gallant band – and a handful of aged survivors – returned to Union soil, they brought with them one or two of the original, beloved wagons of the Thirstland Trek.

Transport riding, before the days of railways, was an occupation at which the Afrikaner excelled. Men now high in the service of the State (Colonel Denys Reitz in Madagascar is an example) have turned to it in difficult times. The railways of today follow the routes where once whips cracked, drivers shouted and wagon wheels thundered. It is not surprising that fortunes should have been founded on this trade – £60 a trip was the profit earned by each wagon on the Port Elizabeth-Kimberley trek which took a month each way. At that

time record breaking journeys were measured in weeks, and many remarkable feats were recorded. The normal pace of a wagon with a full load was fifteen miles a day; but one driver covered twenty miles a day over a distance of four hundred and twenty miles. In 1875 the Port Elizabeth – Bloemfontein journey, which often took two months, was made in twenty-five days.

The world's best wagons were built in South Africa during those stirring times when adventurous spirits were eager to be on the move. Experts declared that the Cape wagon wheels were superior to English artillery wheels. As far back as 1816 the Governor of the Cape paid a Franschhoek farmer, W. J. Naude, a gratuity of 500 Rixdollars for the invention of a "super-wagon" capable of carrying four leaguers of wine with fewer oxen. "It was drawn with the greatest of ease through the heavy sands which intervene between the Cape and FranschHoek,"

reported the *Cape Mercury*. The roads were indeed nothing more than wagon-tracks, and a journey from Cape Town to Caledon – now two hours by motor-car – in bad weather took thirteen days. Some mammoth wagons were built to explore the interior. Pietermaritzburg claimed the largest, Dr. Stanger's "Great Briton", in 1846; but twenty years later Captain Dennistown ordered a larger wagon for an expedition. Cape Town, I think, finally built a veritable Ship of the Veld, twenty-three feet long, six feet wide and six feet from floor to roof.

Men loved their wagons and the wagon life; and it is strange that while South African poets often mentioned the wagon, no one has written a real Saga of the Wagon. (Perhaps Roy Campbell will accept the idea now.) A verse by T. Fannin, however, suggests the spirit of those times:

“I’m a Smouse, I’m a Smouse in the
wilderness wide –
The veldt is my home and the wagon’s my
pride;
The crack of my *voerslag* shall sound o’er the
lea,
I’m a Smouse,
I’m a Smouse, and the trader is free!”

They were proud of their oxen, too, and saw that the calves learnt to recognise the names given to them soon after they were born. Much would depend later on the response to a call or a flick of the whip. Names showed little originality – a Bont-man, Geelbek, Blaauwberg and Donker were to be found in almost every team, for the colour of the animal usually governed the choice of a name.

Sometimes a good span of oxen would be killed by a flash of lightning, the trek-chain conducting the current so that not one escaped. Wild beasts preyed on the teams, poisonous feeds, cattle fevers and thirst explained many of the whitening skeletons

beside the lonely trails. Like the bones of lost ships these relics litter South Africa from the Kunene to Delagoa Bay. The fragments of wrecked wagons and their crews lie in the sand of river beds, buried under desert dunes, decaying in tropical bush.

But the roads were more fascinating in the slow wagon days, and no doubt the evening camp-fire gave more satisfaction to many than modern hotels provide. Though the sailing ship has almost vanished from the oceans, the sturdy wagon will struggle on while trains and motor-cars roar by, a romantic survival indeed.

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